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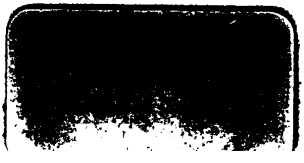

NALO
Somerville

"LIAR! LIAR! LIAR!"

Frontispiece. Page 220.

THE WOLF

BY

EUGENE WALTER

Author of "Paid in Full"

Founded on the Play by

CHARLES SCHLOSSER

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G. W. DILLINGHAM COMPANY

PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

[illegible]

Frontispiece Pag. 230.

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THE WOLF

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The Wolf

CHAPTER I

THE CONFESSION

Jules Beaubien arrived in all anxiety at his father's house. It was a stout old stone structure lying back of a wooded slope on the outskirts of the City of Montreal. It was, in fact, a mansion. The Beaubien family had for generations dealt profitably in the lumber of the great Canadian forests. They were of a line of the sturdiest of the French adventurers that had settled Canada.

The old mansion had known its decades of generous hospitality and joy and laughter. But for some years now it had been a lonely home—the abode only of the master of the house and a

half score old servants. Jules' mother died when he was a lad of twelve, and after that there had been years spent away at school and college. Only now and then had father and son found themselves together in the family hall.

Yet there had always been the gentle understanding of genuine affection between the man and boy. And the summons that had found Jules out in his bungalow in the woods, where he had gone for the autumn shooting, had carried its natural consequences of shock and grief, for it had told him that his father was dying.

The illness had been quite sudden. There had been no forewarning that the man's life was near its end. As a matter of fact, he had only turned the three-score mark, and seemed to have many years before him. But Jules, having passed the silent servants who met him in the hallway with a nod of sympathy to do for all, entered the sick-chamber, and a first glance at his father told him

that death must be hovering very near. The face was shrunken, the lips were pallid, the eyes almost without the light of life in them.

As between two men facing such a crisis, there were no words at first; merely a silent, long pressure of hands.

"I am glad, my son; glad that you have come to me in time. There is, of course, a great deal that I might say to you now that you will have to take up the responsibilities of our properties. And yet, after all, not so much is needed in regard to that, for everything is in good shape. Our attorney is perfectly trustworthy and can make everything clear to you—just as clear as I could myself.

"But there is another matter, my son. And this—this will be harder for me to tell you, and yet this I must tell you, Jules. It is the most sacred charge of all that I am leaving to you."

The old man closed his eyes a little while and

opening them again, indicated to his son a bottle on a table nearby. It contained a powerful stimulant left by the physician to ward off the complete collapse that might overtake the sick man during the ordeal of his last interview with his boy.

Having given his father the medicine according to the directions to be read on the bottle, Jules leaned near the pillow and listened to the surprising revelation made in the whispering, weak voice of the dying:

"Jules," said his parent, "you are not alone the heir to my fortune. In law—in law, yes, I think you would be considered the only one. But you are a man of honor, Jules, and you would help your father right a wrong—would you not, Jules?"

His son nodded quickly in assent.

Outside, the twilight settled among the great oak trees, and gusts of winter-threatening winds

sent the brown leaves flapping against the panes in the big bow window. And with this monotony made by the wind and leaves—a sad forest voice sounding without—Jules leaning over his father's pillow heard for the first time in his life of the existence of his little sister, Annette.

The business of Beaubien *père* had necessitated many trips into the far-off forest land where he had made his contracts for the purchase of lumber. It had been on a trip made twenty years ago to the Nipissing country that he had met a squaw of the Ojibway tribe. In her slender youthfulness, her great brown-eyed simplicity, she was very beautiful. The sin was quite commonplace among the white men who had invaded the primitive homes of the forest tribes —with its consequent, the "marriage" that was no marriage at all.

Annette was born. The day that she opened her eyes on the world—great, brown trustful eyes—

eyes like her mother's, the mother herself had given up her life. She had died in full faith that her marriage had been all that it should be; and she had died in full faith that the father whose mysterious "affairs" kept him far from her bedside at the hour of her death would come to claim his little child.

But this Beaubien the elder had not dared to do. His means permitted him to exercise some sort of protection over the little one. He caused her adoption by a French-Canadian family in the valley of the Nipissing, where Annette was born. In the rude schools, but in the fresh, invigorating air of the woods, the child had grown into maidenhood.

"I myself have never dared to see her although I have longed most sincerely from time to time for a sight of the little girl," whispered the dying Beaubien. "But they told me she had grown up to be very beautiful and to be more French

than Indian in appearance and character; that she showed signs of real caste in breeding and a disposition all tenderness and goodness. Now that your mother has been dead so many years, I had made up my mind to bring the little girl to our home; to give her the full rights and recognition that belonged to her; to send her to the best educational institutions; in short, I meant to make her my daughter in everything. For some time also I hesitated to do so on your account. You have been a worthy son. I did not know if you could forgive me; if you could welcome this little girl. But, Jules, as you have grown into manhood I have understood and appreciated what a great, generous heart is in your breast. There have been countless acts of yours of which I have come to know that have decided me that you would join with me heartily in giving this little half-sister of yours the advantages of wealth and education.

"But when I would have done this, there suddenly came over the good people in whose care I had left Annette, a strange silence. My letters to them have remained unanswered. Perhaps they have grown to love the child so much that they do not wish to part with her. But in all fairness to her, her future must lie in our hands—in your hands, my son.

"And that is why I have spoken. It is to ask you for your promise that when my eyes have been closed for the last time, you will, without loss of time, seek out your sister—you do not mind my calling her your sister, Jules?—and take charge of her future, that you will give her your protection and, perhaps, your love, my son, for after all she is of our blood and that, itself, will make its own strong, silent appeal to the heart of a Beaubien."

The man's head had fallen back on the pillow.

There had come into his eyes the very glaze of death itself.

He could barely whisper the final words of instruction to Jules that informed the young man where could be found the correspondence with the La Porte family in whose care Annette had been left and which would contain in itself sufficient direction to aid him in the search for his half-sister.

Beaubien *père* only lived long enough after that to hear his son's earnest assurance that Annette should be sought and found, and that having been found would be cared for and endowed with all of her father's wealth that her needs should demand. In short, Jules promised to give her all the love and protection that she might expect had she been born, as he was, in the great, old mansion of the Beaubien family.

And this assurance made his father's death wholly peaceful.

Upon this promise to his dying father is founded the tragic story of what befell Jules Beaubien—of his own romance that he found out in the wilderness, of the strategy and courage with which he met and defeated his great enemy, and of the stirring adventures that terminated in a deadly duel—all growing out of the quest that began some few days after his father had been laid at rest and he sought the Nipissing country to find his little half-sister, Annette.

It is fitting that the reader should know more of Beaubien as he begins this journey lest he should be regarded as merely the type of the rich man's son—easy in morals, easy in love, easy in principle.

That is the type of young man that belongs more absolutely to the larger cities; that is the type of young man who has not known, as young Beaubien had known since he was big enough to shoulder a gun, the life of woods and camp;

the life of physical prowess that preserves the nerves and the sanity of youth; that does even more—that preserves the decency of young men.

The forest and its lively air, its primitive atmosphere of self-dependence; its almost hourly demand for displays of personal courage founded on physical effort, had done more than make Beaubien a decent fellow. It had made him sympathetic with those less fortunate in life's station than himself. It had brought him in touch with the rugged trappers and lumbermen and their no less rugged families. It had made a wholesome democrat of him. It had made of him, of course, an admirable specimen of physical manhood. He was tall and straight and lithe. His skin was brown and smooth with a tinge of red color fighting to show beneath. His blood flowed freely and with strength.

Beaubien had known in a small way the temptations of the city. He had been a lively

youngster in his student days that had only barely gone into the past. At the time of his father's death he was twenty-five years old. The pranks of extreme youth were behind him. And when he searched his own desires he found them more strongly calling him to the beautiful forests, to the excitements of the hunt, than they ever could claim him for the divertisements of the ballroom or the pleasures of the café.

He was untouched by the cynicism of college-mates of affected worldliness. He believed in the old-fashioned virtues; he was a disciple of honesty; he was a follower of the ancient religion of Rome.

Simple, almost unsophisticated, if you will, but nevertheless clean, manly, with a straight eye and a steady hand—this was the Jules Beaubien who had been entrusted with the finding of little Annette and of the task of righting the wrong that her hidden father had placed upon

her from her cradle; this was the Jules Beaubien who, a few days after his father had been laid at rest, had a long talk with the estate's attorney; arranged business affairs looking toward his own absence and set out with a heart all generously inclined, to find a half-breed Indian maiden and return with her to his father's house and compel that social world of Montreal to whom the name of Beaubien stood as most representative of the new aristocracy of the new country, to bid her welcome as his father's child.

CHAPTER II

ANNETTE

Until Jules Beaubien, having made his way to the Nipissing country, had found Baptiste Le Grand, his quest of Annette had been a great puzzlement. The family that had cared for Annette had moved from the valley. The parish priest had been making a long tour to some of the outlying lumber camps, taking the Gospel to the isolated workers, and others whom he met and asked of Annette had told him nothing. They had looked upon his youth and good looks, and demanded rather sharply why he asked of her whereabouts, and when he frankly told them that he was her brother come to seek her—come to show her wealth and high social station—they had moved away from him, refusing answer. They had only to say:

"Speak with Ba'tiste Le Grand; he knows—Ba'tiste Le Grand, he can tell you the story of Annette."

Of the whereabouts of this Le Grand they could tell him little. But they bade him await in patience the return of this hunter. He would be back in the village within a week, they said, ready to ship his game and the hides to the markets.

Beaubien, perforce, waited.

He thought sorely of this Le Grand. Did all this secrecy mean that Le Grand had wronged the girl; that she had gone away in the wilderness to live as an Indian woman might, and not as a girl who had been brought up in religion and with some learning at least? What in the world did it mean?

Baptiste Le Grand was to tell him all about Annette; or rather Baptiste was to sit there most of the time, a young, squat, strong-shouldered

man of the woods, and listen with fiercely glowing eyes while Father Paul told the story—the piteous, horrible story of Annette.

Baptiste had Father Paul as his passenger in his canoe. In the humble cottage that was the pastorate, Jules, seeking Father Paul, found also Baptiste Le Grand. And when he inquired concerning Annette, Baptiste had leaped to his feet and glared at him and demanded to know instantly who he was and why he made inquiry.

Then Jules told of the death of his father; of the confession of the death-bed, and both Father Paul and Le Grand knew that Jules was telling the truth, because little Annette had told of this mysterious father to the priest, her confessor; to Baptiste Le Grand, to whom she had been betrothed.

Baptiste began the story of Annette. But scarcely had he begun when he cursed and was seized with a rage that was utterly mad so that

Father Paul signified to him that he was to do no more talking. The little priest then took up the account of the hopelessly tragic adventures of Annette.

"I am afraid," began the good father, "that I myself am not without some blame. I am afraid that I have frowned too sternly; that I misjudged; that I believed it in the beginning an offence that indicated that the girl had not profited by the teachings of the Church. This pained and astounded me. For Annette had always seemed more French than Indian. None of her instincts had indicated the savage; none of her thoughts had seemed otherwise than gentle and pure. And now that I know fully all the agony of shame that the child suffered, all the deadly despair that preyed upon her—ah, it shall be a long, long time before I will forgive myself for the severity with which I looked upon her child's face. Of course, I had meant

that forgiveness should in the end be fully given her. But in my duty to the moral discipline of my congregation, I withheld for a few days this forgiveness. The result was frightful. Perhaps in any event it would have been the same. Perhaps no comfort could have been given the child in her shame."

The priest sighed and continued:

"Jules Beaubien, you see I have not spared myself; I will tell you all concerning Annette.

"In the beginning, you must know that she was the fairest and sweetest girl in the Nipissing valley. This with my own eyes, although reluctantly, I could not help but observe.

"That she was devout and of the gentlest and sweetest disposition I also observed with rejoicings of my heart. And so modest and shy was Annette that although I had often a worried heart over other of the maidens of the flock, with her I never had concern of this kind."

Beaubien was left gripping his chair, for the priest fell suddenly into staring at the floor and Le Grand stared also, so that the silence became intolerable.

"Well—well?" demanded Jules. "There was a man—a man who betrayed her?"

"Yes," said the priest.

"But she was but a child, Father."

"Eighteen years old, my son, and here in the woodlands a maiden is ranked at womanhood when she is eighteen. But it had all been settled. She was to have married Ba'tiste Le Grand.

"In your eyes, M'sieur Le Grand may not appear so splendid a choice. But here in the woods, M'sieur Ba'tiste is accounted a man of first quality—sturdy in labor, clean in habits, of great Christian heart."

"I know—I know the kind of man," said Jules, with an impatient gesture. "Oh, I know men of the woods, Father Paul. I love them as

I do the forest they inhabit. But that is why I am doubly pained at what you tell—that a man of the woods could so have offended against the innocence and purity of Annette."

"Non—non," cried Le Grand. "He was not of us! He was a stranger to us! He was—" he clenched his hands, emotion oppressing him so that he could not speak.

"He was as I have heard," said Father Paul, "a consummately villainous man. The simple folk did not even know his name. But he was an American—from New York—a chief of engineers—a man quite old enough to have been Annette's father. One hardly can learn how the meeting came about. Still, these engineering parties are numerous in our wilderness in these days of vast railroad enterprises.

"Poor little Annette, she hardly told her story —not—not even to me. To some of the women in her days of delirium, she whispered or cried out

of her wrongs—the man's interest that had appeared so kindly; the tales he told her of his greatness and his wealth; the fascinations of the great cities with which he filled her ears; the marriage that he promised and then—then he disappeared."

"What kind of a man of the woods were you—what kind of a man at all, Ba'tiste Le Grand," cried Jules Beaubien, "you who the priest tells me were her honest lover, that you stood by to see all this happen—that you did not take your gun and kill—"

Father Paul's hand went up in warning. Le Grand was staring sullenly at Beaubien.

"Ba'tiste did not know. He had gone to work during the winter with the Hudson Bay Company—far—far in the north. When he returned—when he returned there was nothing to be done," the priest murmured.

"Nothing—why?"

"Because—"

"She did not wantonly go with him as his mistress?"

"No," said the priest, swiftly.

"Then what—what has happened? Where is Annette now?" demanded Beaubien. "No matter what her sin has been, there is the promise I made to my dying father. There is, moreover, a duty that I owe her now, for God knows, if ever this poor child needed a brother to shield and protect her, it is now—now!"

Jules had arisen. The priest laid his hand on his shoulder, gently forcing him back into his chair.

But Baptiste Le Grand got up.

"Jules Beaubien, you have come too late to help her—just as I came too late to help her. Annette—Annette—she is dead."

Jules stared. Father Paul would have spoken but Baptiste cried hoarsely:

"Non—non—I tell. I tell you, her brother, how she died! You listen! He leave her. He is gone many months. She hear nothing. Then she know that all he has said have been lies; then she know that he will never come back. Then she know that before all—everybody—she is in shame! And then she go—she go!" Baptiste's rough voice had broken and the end came in a sob—"She go an' she die—she die an'—Jules Beaubien, the wolves—the wolves—they eat her up!"

"Eaten by wolves!" cried Beaubien. "God! Father Paul, is this true?"

The priest was silent.

For indeed it was true. The priest told slowly of the frightful happening. The girl had run away from her foster parents. She had been found wandering again and again in the wilderness and in the snow. Trappers brought her to their huts, and they that had women folk gave

her to their care. Sometimes she was delirious; sometimes she was quiet, like a little scared child. In her delirium a part of her story had become known. Yet she had never whispered the name of the man.

On the wildest night of the winter she had disappeared from the house that had sheltered her. A blizzard roared and screamed along the mountain sides and piled the snow impassably in the valley. The searching parties had come home without a trace of her. But there, as she lay in the snow, the wolves had found her—found her and her little baby in her arms—or rather found something that resembled her and her little child. The rest was too horrible to tell.

When Baptiste Le Grand left the home of Father Paul to seek his own cabin that night, Jules Beaubien was with him. Over the rough pine table they discussed again the story of Annette. And the handsome face of Jules

Beaubien took on a ghastly tinge of color beneath its bronze; and staring straight into the eyes of Baptiste Le Grand, he said with an intensity that drew back his upper lip and bared his strong white teeth:

"You, my friend, who loved her like an honorable man, and I, my friend, her brother—we who were not here to protect her—we, Ba'tiste Le Grand and Jules Beaubien—we must hunt and hunt until we find this man, and when we find him—"

More words were idle. Each man could read the declaration in the other man's eyes.

Clumsily the squat, strong Le Grand opened the neck of his leather jacket and the collar of his woollen shirt. He detached a silver crucifix from the chain around his neck. Slowly, solemnly, he kissed the shining symbol. And then he held it out. Jules took it, and as solemnly and reverentially he placed his lips upon it.

CHAPTER III

HILDA

Jules Beaubien and Baptiste Le Grand had been hunting the grim hunt for two years. The comradeship between the young wealthy Beaubien and the tough, rough man of the woods had become almost as master and dog.

Baptiste knew that if they were to find the man it would be the keen wit of Jules that would discover him. And Jules he respected also as being as good a woodsman as himself. Jules' early boyhood had been in the great forests. Later his wealthy lumberman father had sent him to the fine college of the Jesuits in Montreal, and Jules had—why, he had been in Montreal, in Toronto, and in Quebec. He was a man of the world—a great man in the eyes of Baptiste Le Grand.

It gratified Baptiste for Jules to tell him again and again that after all he loved the woods best; that the strong, sweet breath of the pines was after all the best breath of life; that there were no more imposing cathedrals built to God than the huge mountains of God's own creation; that a man's soul was the cleaner for the life in the big silent places of the world—places like these forests where they roamed and hunted—always hunted—for the man they meant to kill.

Such is the crazy-quilt pattern of our lives, that Jules, in wanderings directed by hatred, found love. He himself scarcely realized that, but it was true.

In the Indian summer, when their search was a year old, Jules and Baptiste had heard that often parties of engineers, seeking to solve the great railway problems of the Northwest, quartered themselves at the house of one Andrew McTavish.

The man they hunted—he was an engineer. Baptiste had not seen him. Baptiste had been deep in the woods, toiling for the Hudson Bay Company. He, coming out of the woodlands, had, like Jules coming out of the city, both in quest of Annette, found only the soiled tale of her memory and the ghastly news of her wild death.

That year they found no party of engineers at McTavish's house. But there Jules found Hilda. She had great strands of shining golden hair in contrast to his crisp, black curls; she had great blue eyes in contrast to his eloquent, expressive brown eyes. And her eyes wore an expression that struck swiftly into the heart of Beaubien—a startled, hurt expression that never went out of them.

One understood this look in her eyes when one came to know the fanatical McTavish, her father.

He was huge, gaunt, the spare figure somewhat

bent by the passing of seventy years. But still he was a rugged man. There was enormous power yet in the big hands that had fought a fortune out of the forest—an endless battle with the giant trees.

His hair that had been sandy was yellowish white. There was a shock of it on his head; thick patches of it bristled over his eyes; a huge beard hung from his face.

Hilda's golden hair, her big blue eyes, her fair skin, her slender form were hateful to old McTavish. Jules found that out. Indeed, McTavish made no secret of the fact that he saw in the girl but a reproduction of the mother—the woman whom he had married, who had dwelt and suffered with his harshness until one summer an itinerant French trader had brought something into her life that she had never known, a happiness that transported her, a happiness that made her reckless with the hope of retaining it.

She had fled from McTavish. She had left Hilda.

If men's minds brood, the vast, silent places are not good. McTavish had come to such a place, swearing as far as in his power to keep his child from the eyes of men. Out of the broodings came a certainty in his mind that all women were evil. He read his Bible with interpretations that fitted his mania.

Hilda had to bear the brunt of all this bitterness. From the days when she could lisp she remembered her father's own thick Scotch speech harshly telling her that her soul was like the soul of her mother—black, black, black!

Jules and the faithful Baptiste had gone away, Jules thinking that it was only pity that made him remember so much of the blue-eyed Hilda. But in the long winter and the sweet spring, the truth got into him. He loved Hilda. But there was Annette—Annette to be revenged.

Circumstances worked the solution. The party of engineers, in which might be the man that he and Baptiste sought, that they had trailed through this second summer of their hunt, had quartered themselves at the lonely house of McTavish. So Jules and the faithful Baptiste had come once more under the roof of the queer, cruel Scot.

It was not strange, with little Annette always in the thoughts of dull, faithful Baptiste Le Grand, that half unconsciously he had begun to speak of her to McTavish.

The red sun was half hidden by the giant pines, a brook gurgled softly behind the jagged rocks that bound the clearing in which the Scot's rough log house stood. McTavish sat in a huge chair, his long, gaunt legs crossed. He puffed at his pipe jerkily. His little blue eyes shot scorn at Baptiste.

The Frenchman's pipe had been laid aside on

the rustic seat built around the trunk of a huge pine. Baptiste had his back against the tree trunk. His heavy hairy hand tugged thoughtfully at his rough brown beard.

"An' ye say she deed, mon?" asked McTavish. "Went out in the snow and froze to death, eh? An' ye loved her?"

With an affirmative nod Baptiste said:

"Oui—er, how you say, yes."

"An' I suppose had she lived ye'd a'taken her for wife?"

"Yes."

"An' her a half-breed and havin' a bairn of another man?"

"Yes—yes. I lofe her. M'sieur M'Taveesh."

The Scot grunted.

"Mon, ye hae nae knowledge o' weemen."

"I don't onnerstan'."

McTavish waved his hand as a man who could explain but saw no occasion to take the trouble.

"Ye say her name was what—Annette? H'm! Did she love ye?"

Le Grand stared.

"I teenk so," he said.

"Ye're a fool," flared the Scot. "Ye're a muckle sight better off wi'out her. It's a guid thing she's gone—the wanton."

Baptiste hardly understood more than the tone. But he got up suddenly and drew nearer McTavish.

"I no mak fight with you—not now. Sometime mabbe I come back and I ask you to tak back what you say. You know, Annette, she is the half sistaire of Jules Beaubien. Two mothaire—one fathaire—you onnerstan'?"

"Ye mean, mon, that Jules' faither was the mon who was the faither to this half-breed?"

"Yes. Sometime this man, fathaire of Jules, he trade in the Nipissing country. He live in

Montreal. His wife too. Sometime in the Nipissing country he meet one ver' fine Ojibway squaw, and sometime, mabbe, he say to squaw, 'I make you one ver' fine, gran' lady. You be ma wife.' The squaw she lofe him. She no know of dat othaire wife in Montreal.

"And sometime there is one petite fille—one leet' girl—and jus' the same time the leet' girl she opens the eyes, the squaw she die. And this leet' girl, some one tak her home and her fathaire come once ever' leet' while, and he name her Annette. Ah, M'sieur McTaveesh—dees Annette she was so sweet, so good."

"Bah, ye idiot! Nae weemen are guid. Well, well? Go on."

"I lofe her. I want her for ma wife. I leave to go to the North to do the work for the Hudson Bay Compagnie. I come back. I look for Annette. She no is there. Annette she is—how you say, M'sieur McTaveesh?"

"Deed?"

"Yes—dead."

"We all got to dee," grunted McTavish. "It's sma' use wastin' yer life whinin' over weemen. 'Tis far better, Ba'tiste, that a man worry his soul over money. 'Tis more faithfu'."

"No, no!" cried Baptiste, and new lights came up into his eyes. "You—leesen. While I am away in the North, Annette she is meeting one American. I dunno his name or where he came. Annette she lofe him. He say to her, 'Annette, you be ma wife. I take you to ma country.' And she believe. She say, 'C'est bien,' and he say, 'Dere is priests here,' and he"——

"Ba-ah, mon," exclaimed the Scot, furiously. "I know yer story. There was nae priest. Nor did she want 'em. She enjoyed herself wi' this mon and he left her, and there was a child. And because people wouldn't hae her aroun', which was right, she went wanderin' and got lost in the

cold and was deed. Ba-ah! Ba'tiste, ye're a fool. Weemen are the deevil. All o' thim hae black hearts. I've had a woman mysel', mon. I ken what I say."

It was Baptiste who turned scornful.

"You mak one gran' mistake. Jules he come to Nipissing to find his sistaire. He find only me. I tell him: 'She is dead.' The hearts of Jules and Ba'tiste grow cold—ver' cold—and M'sieur M'Taveesh, sometime Jules and Ba'tiste fin' dees man. Sometime mabbe they keel him. Eh? Onnerstan'?"

"I tell ye, ye're a fool wastin' yer time chasin' some man. 'Twas the weeman's wish and always hae been. They're all o' the same color."

It softened McTavish's mind none to observe, at this moment of his talk with Baptiste, his own daughter as she appeared walking out of the doorway, tin pail in hand, making her way to the spring. Baptiste lumbered toward her with a

view to carrying the pail. McTavish's voice came harshly:

"Ba'tiste, I gie ye the freedom o' my house. Leave my daughter alone. 'Tis her business to haul the water. Weemen are worth nothin' but work."

The girl shrank back, the startled, frightened look that even the dull Baptiste had noticed, understood and pitied, shining in her eyes.

"Hilda," said the Scot roughly.

"Yes, father."

"What are ye snivellin' aboot? Gang awa' to yer work. Remember ye're my daughter and the mither before ye was worthless. Do yer work cheerfully and trust yer soul to God. Gang awa'!"

"Hey, M'sieur McTaveesh—you one bad man," said Baptiste, with a curious hissing softness.

"And ye're a French fool, full o' rainbows and sentiments. I tell ye the girl's worthless. So was her mither before her."

"Hey, you, M'sieur McTaveesh," said Baptiste, still softly. "Sometime, mabbe, Mam'selle Hilda she tak ze pail for wataire, and sometime mabbe Jules Beaubien he go to tak the pail from her and you say 'Non.' Sometime mabbe you do that, Jules Beaubien, he feex you."

"A Frenchman fix me!" roared the gaunt old Scotchman. "Ye make me laugh." He leaned back in his big chair. "Ye were speakin' o' Annette. An' ye saw Hilda. That was her mither's name—the name o' the wanton. I married her in Halifax. She was a Swede. She had nae money and nae friends, and I married her to take her off the streets. I didna love her. There's nae such thing as love in a mon that's a mon. But I was a guid mon to her and the least she could hae done would hae been to gie me a son. Did she? Nae. The towhead there who had the pail was my Christmas

present. And still I was guid to her, and what did she do? Fell in love wi' a Frenchman and ran awa', leavin' me that to take care o'."

"McTaveesh, you are one bad man."

"Bad? Ye're a fool, like all Frenchmen. What did I do with Hilda that was bad? She has her mither's curse—all weemen hae it—and I bring her here away from men and teach her to be humble and obedient accordin' to the law o' God, and men. Nae mon can speak tae her except French-Canadians, and they're only half mon, thank God, and not apologizing to ye for the remark."

Humbly Hilda returned toward the house, bearing the dripping pail.

"Look at her. Ye can see the sin o' her mither in her face!"

An insane light came into McTavish's little gray eyes as he spoke, and there was an uncanny

ring in his voice. The girl heard. She recoiled under the brutal cry.

Baptiste was again on his feet, but with a furious gesture the Scot waved him back. Baptiste stared after the girl as she disappeared. The woodsman looked curiously at the strange father.

"Sometime, M'sieur McTaveesh," he said, "mabbe Mam'selle Hilda, she lofe a good man. Sometime, mabbe, some good man lofe Mam'selle Hilda. What you do den?"

"He'll marry her by the law o' God an' the Presbyterian Church or I'll wring her neck," half shouted the fanatic.

"M'Taveesh, you are one big, bad fathaire, eh?"

"Ye're a French fool."

Up came Baptiste's shoulders. He smiled.

"Au revoir. I go fin' ma fren' Jules Beaubien."

McTavish chuckled.

"Right ye are, mon—and bring him back. He makes laugh an' few do. I dinna ken any mon so full o' humor as Jules, although he is French."

The cracking twigs sounded fainter as Baptiste disappeared.

CHAPTER IV

THE BAD WOMAN

Craft and meditation came into old McTavish's eyes as he smoked for awhile in silence.

Then he looked up and called roughly:

"Hilda!"

The girl, with her frightened stare, appeared in the doorway.

"Come here! Sit down," he said, and when she had walked over and taken a place at his feet, he looked her over very deliberately as if by an unbidden impulse. " 'Tis a shame, girl, ye hae yellow hair," he continued, but there was very little softening in his voice. "Yer mither had it and she was nae good."

"Yes, father," said the girl blankly.

"This engineer, MacDonald, that we hae wi' us now, and that—that"—McTavish spat—"that

young—young Ferguson. Hae ye talked to thim?"

"Yes, father."

"Did ye ask thim what I told ye to?"

"Yes, father."

"Yes, father—yes, father!" exploded McTavish. "Hae ye any ither words in yer empty head? Ye might know ye're a Swede—the Scotch talk!"

"What shall I say?" asked the bewildered daughter.

"Ach, ye fool," stormed the parent. "If I told ye what to say, I'd hae nae business askin' ye. Don't slink away like that! Dinna be lookin' as if I meant to eat ye up! God knows ye're little eno', but ye're mine and I'll do me duty to me ain. But curse the day ye got the yellow hair. Now tell me what MacDonald and the young jackanapes Ferguson said, if ye can find words wi' yer Scandinavian tongue."

"I didn't find out a great deal from Mr. MacDonald," said the girl, "or from Mr. Ferguson either, but Jules told me——"

"I dinna care what Jules told ye. Er—well, what did Jules say?"

"Well, Jules said Mr. MacDonald was a railroad engineer and Mr. Ferguson worked for him."

"Worked fer him? I'm glad to hear it. I hadna seen him work fer anybody sin' he's been here. Well—go on."

Under this encouragement the girl drew her golden head nearer her father's knee.

"Jules said that Mr. MacDonald was up here to find a way to build a railroad through the Abbitti country. He said that the Americans were going to build it and that Mr. MacDonald was a great man."

Hilda gazed up, frightened again. Her father had uttered a rude burst of laughter.

"Build a railroad through the Abbitti country?" he cried.

"Yes, father. And Jules said that if they did build it they would haul to Montreal the yearly harvest."

"O' what—ice?" scoffed McTavish.

"Jules said wheat."

"Jules must hae been drunk. Well, go on. Tell me aboot it."

"I asked Mr. MacDonald, and he was very nice to me."

"He was? That's yer yellow hair again. Well, speak up, Hilda! Tell me aboot it—the whole 'o it."

The girl drew nearer. She was always making these little approaches to the harsh, stern old man, only to find herself suddenly rebuffed. But now, as she talked, she almost seemed to forget his awesome presence.

"Mr. MacDonald didn't tell me much about

his business here, but, father"—the girl's voice rose—"he told me all about his country, and the buildings, and the ladies, and the millions of people. And he showed me some pictures of trains that go on one of his railroads, and a book about the theatre, with pictures of all the beautiful actresses, and I almost forgot to ask about his business. He was so gentle and kind and so—"

"Take care, girl," said the Scot bitterly; "take care ye dinna follow the path o' yer wicked mither an' lure Mr. MacDonald to his destruction. He's a fine mon, and dinna ye be interferin' wi' his business wi' yer yellow hair."

McTavish arose, and the girl got up, too. He pushed her rudely.

"Into the house wi' ye!" he said sharply, and pray God to forgi' ye for not bein' Scotch."

He walked about, ruminating in his unimaginative mind this vast and seemingly impossible railroad scheme of which he had just heard. The

sounds of his daughter at her work inside drew his thoughts back to her for an instant.

"I'm thinkin'," he muttered, "that the same God was very careless when he turned out Swedes."

He resumed his stroll.

A youth came up the rocky path unobserved. He was snub-nosed, smiling, presenting the countenance of a mischievous urchin, as he looked over the slowly moving, hulking figure of McTavish.

His boyish features were surmounted by a big sombrero. His jacket was of khaki, his trousers of corduroy. His feet were protected by heavy-soled shoes with long-laced uppers. There was a jauntiness to the flare of his blue flannel collar and the careless knotting of the scarf.

This was young Ferguson. And by the way of relieving the monotony of the woodland life, the sullen McTavish was young Ferguson's game.

"Hello, Santa Claus," he called cheerily, as he approached.

McTavish wheeled.

"Santa Claus," he snarled. "Away wi' ye."

"Too near dinner time," replied Ferguson, by way of apology.

"Ye young jackanapes! Ye're much too free wi' yer tongue."

Ferguson took a seat against the tree.

"Well, old Ironsides," he said cordially.

"Ironsides?" demanded McTavish.

"Excuse me, Sir Walter Scott," pursued Ferguson.

"Ye're an impudent rascal," snorted the Scot.

"Oh, all right, Robert Bruce. If you don't get mad, I'll sing 'Annie Laurie' for you. How'll that suit you?"

"Ye hae nae respect for yer elders," cried McTavish, shaking his horny fist near Ferguson's

face, "an' if ye dinna treat me better, I'll be chastisin' ye."

"If you do," said Ferguson, shaking his finger at the big man as if he had been a naughty child, "if you do that, Bonnie Prince Charlie, I'll make you get a hair cut."

"Ye brat! Ye're incorrigible."

"Wrong again. I'm in Canada," smiled Ferguson.

"Ba-ah!" roared the Scot.

"Two ba-ahs," replied Ferguson.

"I'll be tellin' Mr. MacDonald on ye to make ye behave," muttered McTavish, retreating into the house.

"Tattle-tale! Tattle-tale!" called Ferguson after him.

The jackanapes leaned against a tree and groaned.

"An hour before grub time, and I'm as hollow as a barrel. Oh, you, Hilda!" he cried cordially,

at sight of the girl's gorgeously golden-haired head in the doorway; "what's the one best bet for dinner? No, don't tell me. I've got it—pork and beans to win, biscuits for place, and coffee to show."

"Why, what does all that mean, Mr. Ferguson?" smiled the girl.

The jackanapes looked tragic.

"Hilda, that cost me so much to learn that I won't give it up for nothing."

"You're a funny man," laughed the girl.

"Ain't I?" agreed Ferguson cheerfully, with a comical screw of his urchin's face. "I've just been giving that amiable father of yours some of my comedy, and he's gone off into the woods to bite a tree in two. He's the happiest man I ever saw, and I guess that's what makes him so sore. Every time he suspects he's happy he gets mad."

Hilda was a bit confused at the rattle of raillery that came from the young fellow.

"Father," she said seriously, "is very harsh."

"Harsh? Oh, nothing like that. Nix. Why, say, Hilda, that dad of yours is hiding behind that white beard and throwing an awful bluff. Why don't you call him?"

"Call him?" queried the girl, puzzled at the slang phrase.

"Yes, call him," said young Ferguson, warmly. "I notice the way he treats you, and while it's none of my affair, I don't think it's a square deal."

"I don't quite understand you," answered the woodland girl with a slow shake of her gloriously mantled head.

"Well, well; I suppose not. What I mean is that you are too nice a girl to have anybody trying to whip you all the while."

"Oh, no, Mr. Ferguson," said Hilda earnestly, "he's never struck me."

"Not in the face, maybe, but I guess in the

heart, all right," said the boy. "Say, tell me about yourself. It doesn't seem exactly right that you are the daughter of that old blunderbuss."

Hilda looked at him in frightened fashion.

"Oh, but I am. You know I am," she protested.

"Sure, sure," Ferguson hastened to say; "but I mean he makes it altogether too rough. You know, since I've been up here fussing around with MacDonald, I couldn't help hearing things, and Jules has told me a lot."

"You like Jules?" demanded the girl suddenly.

"Well, I should think I did," came the enthusiastic reply. "He's a great fellow. I ain't got any prejudice against these Frenchmen, and Jules can run for my money."

"And what," asked Hilda anxiously, "did Jules tell you?"

Ferguson drew very near her.

"Oh, a lot, and nothing much. Hilda, do—you like me?"

"Yes," she said frankly.

"That's good! Few girls do. But he told me—well, if you'll stand for this, I'll tell you. Jules told me about—about your mother—how she came over here alone without a red cent in her bankroll and landed in Halifax—didn't even know how to speak English; how she was pretty, just like you are, and how this old fellow married her and treated her awful rough, and how you came into the world looking just like her, and how mad it made the old man. And then how he raised the devil with her until she ran away and died and left you with the old man all alone, and how he came into the woods and he brought you up, treating you all to the bad, keeping you away from men and always telling you about your mother."

The boy took her hand in a frank, brotherly fashion.

"Say, Hilda, I don't stack up very strong in this world, and maybe somewhere in my system there's a streak of yellow; but I'd go through a lot for you; and so would Jules. Jules, Hilda, is a good man. And, take it from me, there ain't many."

The touch of young Ferguson's hand gave the girl courage to utter the question that was trembling on her lips.

"Do you think my mother was such a bad woman, Mr. Ferguson?"

"Not on your life!" cried the boy. "Hilda some folks go to the bad because they kind of like that sort of thing, and some go because they're driven, just like you drive your dogs in the winter time. But I guess those who are driven have an even chance in heaven with those who are not."

Hilda uttered a little sob of happiness.

"Thank you, thank you," she whispered. "You are the first human being outside of Jules who ever told me that. And I love my mother and her memory," concluded the girl, with infinite tenderness.

"Why—why"—Ferguson was both abashed and angry to find his throat clogged. "Sure you do. Well, well, Hilda—say," he went on, resuming his characteristic grinning demeanor, "will grub be ready soon? I'm awful strong for that sort of business."

"Pretty soon," she laughed back at him, "and you've been so nice that I'm going to do my very best."

"Me to the wash up and haircomb things, and I'll try to believe I'm in the United States."

Hilda watched him enter the house, smiling prettily at the good-natured youngster.

And then she turned suddenly and peered past the rocks and down into the valley through the

big pines. A voice that she knew was humming the snatch of a merry song, and a firm, quick footfall sounded on the soft turf of the pathway leading to the house. MacDonald, the wonderful man—the man who had set her dreaming of the great cities—MacDonald was approaching.

CHAPTER V

THE WOLF

MACDONALD appeared in the clearing, waving his hand to the girl and calling her name. She watched him intently as he approached. There was that in her gaze and attitude that was suggestive of a fascinated bird.

The chief engineer was a stalwart man, and a splendid combination of physical and mental strength was to be quickly read in his compact yet supple and broad-shouldered body, in his large, clearly chiselled features, and the splendid width and height of the forehead that was fully displayed, because he had thrown back his broad-brimmed hat as he walked with a big, free stride—the stride of a man all confidence and energy.

Success was written in the poise of his head,

and there was magnetism in his fine eyes. In only one feature did the face fail of nobility, and that was his mouth. Its corners had sinister lines. Sensuality and cruelty were marked there with a harsh certainty.

But the innocent, golden-haired girl saw only the attractiveness of the man. Intuition would have told her that he was a man among men, even if Jules had not told her that this MacDonald was a creature of genius, a worker of marvels in engineering; a man who made slaves of the very mountains and valleys that stood seemingly an impassable barrier in the way of the railroads and the progress that came swiftly in the wake of the laying of shining steel rails.

And he was a man to whom the world was an open book—a man who knew the effete places and the wild places of the earth equally well. All that the world had to show he had seen.

He was no longer young. Gray hair was

mixed with his black hair. Deep lines of thought were marked on his brow. But his forty years of life, with all his big efforts, all its dissipations, had not robbed him of vigor, had not made his body flabby or his nerves weak. He was virile, magnetic, superior.

The picturesque garb of the woods—sombrero, hunting jacket, corduroy trousers and leggings—he wore attractively, and it was easy to imagine that in the evening dress of civilization he would have been no less a striking and handsome figure.

"Oh," said the girl eagerly, "I'm so glad you are here."

"I'm mighty glad to be here, little girl," returned MacDonald in his big, genial way. "How are you?"

"Dreaming—dreaming all day, dreaming of what you said to me last night," she replied impulsively.

"I know," he said, with a comprehensive, sympathetic glance of his lively eyes.

"Oh, I could hardly think it was all true," Hilda whispered.

"What?" he asked caressingly.

"That you are really going to take me away from here—from father—from everything that has made me so unhappy; to see something that lies beyond the woods and the barrens; to see the big cities and the people and the ladies."

She halted the rush of words, and came close and looked up into his face.

"You did mean what you said to me, didn't you—every word?"

MacDonald took both her hands and drew her over to the pine tree seat and sat down with her.

"Every word," he said. "You know, Hilda, I've seen how you suffered with your father. I've heard the whole pitiful story of your mother and—I love you. Do you know what love is?"

he added suddenly, and looked at her with something of amused curiosity lurking behind an outwardly ardent glance.

The girl's golden-haired head moved slowly, negatively.

"No," she answered; "but it must be very beautiful. Do they have it up here in the woods just like they do in your country?"

The childish innocence of the query stirred the imagination of MacDonald.

"Yes," he said, and his voice got the swinging cadence of a song almost; "they have it everywhere. The birds have it, the wolves have it, and every living thing has it. And you, Hilda, will have it. No matter what your father has done; no matter how harsh he has been to you, or how he has brought you up; no matter what he has said of your mother, poor soul—you, Hilda, will have love too. As I told you last night, you shall not stay here in this loneliness

forever. You must go beyond the woods and prairies and into the world with me. You've never even had any kindness, Hilda. You must have some kindness."

"I have had kindness," she said to him. "Jules has been kind. Every summer for two years he has come here, and he has always been kind to me. He has made me laugh, and he has treated me just as if mother had never done wrong, as father says. Jules is good—isn't he?"

"Why, yes," said MacDonald easily. "Do you care for him?"

"Yes."

"Love him?"

Hilda stared and smiled.

"I don't know what that means. No one ever said anything to me about that until you did last night. How do you tell when you are in love?"

MacDonald leaned quickly toward her and

caught her hand. The deep qualities in his voice thrilled the girl as he said:

"One feels just as I feel toward you—just as if it were absolutely necessary for you to be with me, and always with me. Something sort of grips you here." He placed her hand upon his heart almost roughly. "Do you feel that, Hilda? Does your heart beat as mine is beating now?"

"I don't know. I don't know," she answered confusedly. "I only know that I have been so lonely and unhappy and miserable. Oh, so miserable!"

All unheard, Jules Beaubien had come to the house by the woodland path. He paused, his cigarette half lifted to his lips, and he saw the engineer's face thrust so closely to the girl's that his lips were almost touching her cheek, as he said:

"I want to take you away from here—from

the cruelty of your father, and all that. Will you go when I go, Hilda?"

"You mean to marry you?"

"Yes; just that."

"Oh, I don't know—I don't know." His hands were upon her arms. "I must go! I must go!" she cried, and there was a sob in her throat as she slipped away from him and ran into the house.

"Hello, MacDonald," said Jules Beaubien, stepping forward. "Have you worked much to-day?"

At the sound of Jules' voice, MacDonald wheeled quickly. For an instant he was ill at ease.

"Hello, Beaubien, where did you come from?" he asked sharply.

The lithe, handsome Jules laughed at him, showing his very white and even teeth, the while he drooped a lid over one expressive brown eye.

"From heaven," he answered cheerfully. "I am—what you call him?—a fairy king. Once I have read of such a king in one of your books. He is everywhere and nowhere—and everywhere when he isn't wanted. Eh?"

MacDonald joined in the laugh.

"Why, you are always wanted, you beggar. Among others, I like to have you around myself."

"Merci! And I—I like to be around. Only here it is somewhat lonely, eh?"

"How, lonely, Beaubien?"

"I mean for you."

"I don't get you."

"Ah, we have forests; eh, M'sieur MacDonald?"

"Yes."

"And rivers, and plenty of lakes with fish; three meals a day and a good night's sleep. But, ah! there is one thing we lack, is there not? One thing you may not be happy without, eh?"

"What—what are you driving at?"

"Women. Is it not so, M'sieur MacDonald? There are but few. I think you like them very much, eh?"

"Jules, you are a happy-hearted beggar, but you are not nearly as clever as I thought you were. I've been all over the world, Jules——"

"Well, I also have been out in the world—Montreal, Quebec and Buffalo. What more can a man ask?"

"I mean, Jules, I have been in all the wildernesses of the world as well. And your argument is wrong."

"How, wrong, M'sieur MacDonald? I am always noted in Canada for being one very smart man."

"Well," grinned MacDonald, "that wouldn't carry you through the world—being smart in Canada."

Jules made a little bow.

"It satisfies me," he answered. "I have money—plenty. My father left me much. I could go to France or America, but I prefer my own country. Only there is one drawback."

"That is?"

"No ladies," laughed Jules.

He was watching MacDonald narrowly. The engineer said a bit flamboyantly:

"Why, that's never troubled me. I've always been able to find them—somehow, some place—no matter where I might be."

"You have?" inquired the young Canadian in surprised tones. "But here, for instance, you are quite alone."

"Oh, not altogether," said the big man complacently. "There's one."

"Hilda?"

"I said there was one here."

"You like her, eh, M'sieur MacDonald?"

"Do you?" demanded the other.

"Oh—oh, yes; I like her. She amuses me. And you? She amuses you, too?"

"Yes," assented McDonald, his self-complacency still uppermost.

"Yet," observed Jules, "Hilda is only a child."

"Twenty-one," observed the engineer.

"Still, MacDonald, she knows nothing. She is—what you say?—innocent."

"Jules, my boy, that's what makes her interesting. When a woman ceases to be innocent, she ceases to be interesting. That's my way of looking at it."

Beaubien rolled a cigarette deftly with his slender, strong young fingers. Had MacDonald's thoughts not been otherwise steeped, he might have noticed that the young Canadian's fingers trembled slightly.

"Maybe you are right," said Jules casually.

He looked up suddenly: "And now I am going

to tell you a little secret, MacDonald. You have been making love to Hilda."

"So have you," retorted the other man.

"Did she tell you so?"

"Why, I know you, Jules. You couldn't any more help making love to a woman than I could. A man has to have some relaxation, eh? It would be strange if you didn't."

Jules laughed.

"How are you getting on?" he asked.

"None of your business," answered MacDonald, with a grin. He sauntered to the pine tree seat and reclined there.

"That's right," commented Beaubien, taking a seat beside him. Jules was silent for several seconds. Covertly he watched MacDonald's face until he saw a look of abstraction come into the engineer's eyes. Then Jules said quickly, suddenly:

"You have a wife in America, M'sieur MacDonald?"

"Yes, and a family," the engineer answered almost as quickly, and in the same instant a look of annoyance came into his face. On consideration, he would not have said so much.

Beaubien's tone went to reassure him.

"Ah, but you are like me. What do you say —out of sight, out of mind, eh? We are both travelers. A wife here or a wife there makes little difference as long as it's just a promise."

"True for you, Jules. What are women for but to amuse you? I go out to build railroads. I serve progress. Why should not I have a little amusement? But, you beggar. we are rivals here—is that it?"

"None of your business."

MacDonald laughed heartily.

"Oh, well, you are not the first Frenchman I have gone up against and got the best of."

"In France?"

"No, in Canada. Three years ago in the

Nipissing country. Ah, my boy, she was a beauty."

Beaubien suddenly tossed away his cigarette.

"French-Canadian?" he asked.

"Half-breed," rejoined MacDonald.

"Ah! So? Maybe I know her."

"Wish you did. Do you know, I'd really like to find out what became of her?" MacDonald smiled fatuously. "Yes, I'd like to know what became of her," he continued. "She was one of those crosses between a good Frenchman and an Ojibway, you know."

"Sure," answered Beaubien, with averted head and white lips. "I know."

"She was certainly a beautiful girl, Jules," MacDonald went on, enthusiastically. "Indian and all. I always figured her about three-quarters French."

"And the rival you spoke about, M'sieur MacDonald. Was he French?"

"Well, I never saw him. He was up in the north woods, some one said. I suppose he was one of those solemn, unkempt fellows like that man of yours—what's his name?"

"Ba'tiste."

MacDonald nodded.

"I was bottled up in that country, Jules, and half mad for a little female society. I won her out, but after awhile she began to talk about a priest and marriage so strong that I had to get out."

"So, M'sieur MacDonald, you left her—this Annette?"

"Why, certainly I did. You wouldn't want to have a half-breed around with you, would you? Besides, she told me there was trouble."

"You mean that——"

"Exactly, Jules, my boy. I didn't care to have a quarter-breed Ojibway in my family, so I went home. Afterward somebody said—I don't

know who—that she got caught in a blizzard and froze to death with her child."

Fighting the fury that stormed in his breast as he listened to the big engineer tell thus coldly the terrible story of Annette, and tell it without so much as a quaver of emotion, of regret, remorse, or pity in his voice, Jules asked:

"And you think, M'sieur MacDonald, that this was the best thing for this Annette to do—to die in the blizzard with her child?"

"Well, after all, certainly! Don't you?"

"I will think it over and some time I will tell you," answered the young Canadian.

There was that in his voice that struck MacDonald suddenly.

"Well, don't get so serious about it," he observed.

"Oh," answered Jules, laughing quickly, "they say I am never serious."

"That's the right way to be. Do you know,

Jules, if ever you got civilized and came to my country I think we'd be good friends."

All Jules' easiness of manner had returned. He threw up his hands and his shoulders and widened his eyes.

"Oh, M'sieur MacDonald, don't you think I'm civilized?"

"Oh, certainly—Montreal, Quebec and Buffalo —what more could a man ask?"

"And also," grinned Jules, "Niagara Falls."

"And some day," said MacDonald, continuing the banter, "if you live long enough, Jules, you may reach Toronto."

"And if you live long enough, MacDonald,"said Jules quickly,"you may reach the United States."

"What the devil do you mean by that?"

"This is a wild country, M'sieur MacDonald, is it not? Many men die. Who knows who will die next? Either of us or one of us may die soon —don't you think?"

"No, I don't. I don't want any such gloomy thoughts about me, either. I've lived long, Jules, and I'm going to live a lot longer. You see there are still plenty of Annettes left. And you?"

"C'est bien. We are rivals."

"For the old man's daughter, eh?"

"Well, are we not?"

"You can count me one if you like," grinned MacDonald, "but I don't count you. And anyway, it's all a joke, eh?"

"Oh, a joke, M'sieur MacDonald. Now it is a laugh—yes?"

The engineer slapped Jules on the shoulder with boisterous good humor, and then announced that he was going into the house to clean up for dinner.

"Coming in?" he asked.

"Very soon," said Jules. "Au revoir."

When MacDonald had disappeared the youth stood peering at the house. In the intensity of

his emotions his lithe figure shook. Even under the bronze of his handsome face the color of livid wrath was discernible.

His thoughts were flaming. He had found the man. He had trailed the wolf. This big, handsome, remorseless human creature was the one whose life he must destroy. This was Annette's betrayer.

His impulse was to rush into the house and upon MacDonald, throttle him, stab him, slay him swiftly. Again and again the impulse had surged into his brain as he had sat and listened to the unsuspecting engineer almost gayly confessing his deep villainy.

But there was not only Annette to be avenged. There was Hilda—Hilda, whom Jules loved, whom he must first get away from the dangerous snares that MacDonald was laying for her. With Hilda out of MacDonald's way and wholly protected, the time of vengeance would be at hand.

CHAPTER VI

"SHE MUST TAKE CARE OF HERSELF"

If the eyesight of McTavish had not been dimmed he would have seen in the face of Jules Beaubien, as he stood staring at the house into which MacDonald had just disappeared, that which would have had excited his curiosity; for the nostrils of Jules were dilated and his eyes were glaring. But McTavish saw none of this as he lumbered out of the house.

"Jules, mon, I'm glad to see ye," he said, with as near an approach to geniality as his nature would allow. Then he looked cautiously about.

"Is the young deevil around?"

"I don't understand."

"That young jackanapes that's wi' Mr. MacDonald," grunted McTavish disgustedly.

"Ah! M'sieur Ferguson?"

"I would nae call him that, Jules, mon, he treats me wi' nae respect."

"Ah, that is not good."

"Called me Santa Claus, mon, and Bonnie Prince Charlie, and made sport of me white hair. What would ye do to him, Jules? What would ye do to him? He'll drive me mad wi' his impudence."

"I'd pay little attention to him, M'sieur. Or, better still, when he says things about your country, you say something back about his country."

"I canna say anything back at the moment, but me fingers tingle to wring his neck, they do, the young jackanapes."

"Make just one little bit of fun of his own country, and I promise you he'll get just as mad as yourself."

"Now, then," said McTavish, fumbling at his long yellowish white beard, "that's a good idea.

When next I see the brat, Jules, I'll look into his face and cry: 'Doon wi' the President and God save the King!' Ye've a clever head on ye, Jules, for a Frenchman, and I canna' help thinkin' that some place in yer family there's a strain o' Scotch."

"And 'soda,'" laughed Jules.

"'Tis another good thing aboot ye, too, Jules," assented McTavish, with a dry chuckle. "Ye could drink almost as much as I can, and it stands to reason nae regular Frenchman could do that. Well, now then, I'll gae into the hoose and say to the young jackanapes, 'Doon wi' the President and God save the King.'"

But Jules suddenly recalled him.

"M'sieur M'Tavish!"

"What is it, mon?"

"I have been coming here one, two summers, eh?"

"Ye hae, mon, and welcome ye've been."

"Many a night you and me, M'sieur M'Tavish, have sat up to see the sun come over the tree tops. And one night, two years ago, do you remember, you were telling me about your wife and Hilda?"

McTavish's geniality passed under a cloud of ferocity.

"Weel, I told ye," he cried, "that the weeman was nae guid an' that the daughter looked like her. She has the curse o' her yellow hair."

"Oui, M'sieur M'Tavish, you told me all that, but you also told me that Hilda—"

"She's nae guid," sharply interrupted McTavish. "She has the curse o' the original sin stamped on her, and Jules, mon, maybe her heart is black wi' the brand o' the deevil!"

"One can never tell, M'sieur M'Tavish," answered Jules gently; "but listen! That night you told me, Jules Beaubien, who am speaking

to you now, that Hilda was never to meet English or Americans or any one except the Indians and the traders. You told me that this was the system by which you hoped to send her soul to Heaven. You said it was your duty and that was why you brought her into the wilderness. Is it not so, mon ami?"

McTavish lowered his big head with its heavy shock of white hair.

"Ye speak the truth," he answered.

"Then why, M'sieur M'Tavish," continued Jules, his voice low almost to whispering, "why, M'sieur MacDonald and M'sieur Ferguson? Is there no danger?"

McTavish clenched his gaunt hands.

"Jules, Hilda is twenty-one," he said, angrily. "'Tis time she learned to tak' care o' hersel'. I've doon me duty as a faither and a member of the kirk, though it's been a long time since I prayed in a house o' worship. I've been a guid

faither to Hilda, and now she must tak' care o' hersel'."

"But if something should happen; what then?"

"Then lad," answered the Scot with a great resonance in his harsh voice, "then I'd know 'twas the mither in her blood an' the wickedness in her soul."

McTavish paused and wheeled, facing Jules fully. He brought up his big hands, with their long, bony fingers distended, and cried furiously, "An' I'd take out her life wi' me bare hands—me bare hands on her throat. It would be me duty to mesel' an' the Church to kill such a wanton daughter."

"But the man, M'sieur M'Tavish; what of him?"

"The mon? I dinna ken what he would do after having been lured to his destruction. 'Twould be her—the girl—that'd merit the punishment o' death."

Jules was looking in astonishment at the old man who had with such evident sincerity made this hideous declaration, when the tensity of the scene was broken by the voice of Ferguson crying:

"Hello, there, King Jamie! How's Mary, Queen of Scots?"

Rage came into McTavish's face. He clenched his hands and puckered his brow in the effort to remember the blow of retort that he had planned for Ferguson. Finally he got it out—but backwards, for in his rage he blunderingly blurted:

"Doon wi' the King and God save the President."

"That's right," chirped Ferguson, slapping him heartily on the back. "Scots awa', and hooray for the Irish. Doon wi' the Germans and God bless the Swedes!"

McTavish, bellowing his wrath, retreated into the house to escape the gibing.

Little Ferguson held his ribs.

"Jules, what a great time I'm having with that old man! It would be mighty dull for me here if he wasn't around."

"You make him very angry."

"Well, Jules, he makes me sore, too, the way he treats that girl."

"Hilda?"

"Yes. Just as if she was to blame because her mother had yellow hair and couldn't stand this old duffer's abuse. Say, can you see me living with the same kind of a woman that he is a man? And listen, if I ever got up against a proposition like that I'd beat it if I had to elope with the family cat."

"You like Hilda?" smiled Jules.

"Sure I like her," said the boy heartily. "Of course, I ain't in love with her or anything like that, because I've quit all that business."

"Yes?"

"Yes, Jules. As a lady-killer, I'm probably the most complete and absolute failure on the masculine bargain counter. I've been up on the remnant shelf in the matrimonial store for years, and not even a servant girl has ever dug into her purse of affection to make one stingy little bid for yours truly. Sentimentally speaking, I'm out. How about you?"

"Me?"

"Yes. Are you long on getting girls to fall in love with you?"

Jules shook his head.

"Why, no, M'sieur Ferguson. I've never had any one in love with me—at least, no girls. My man, Ba'tiste Le Grand, loves me in his dog-like way, but I am alone in the world—even more so than yourself."

Ferguson smiled.

"If enough of our sort get together we'll have a lot of company," he observed. "I guess,

after all, we'll have to give MacDonald the credit."

"Why MacDonald?"

"Why, MacDonald is the one great, positive success in the lovemaking business. He's had enough girls, Jules, and has enough now, I guess, so that if he wanted to hand them around he could supply all us fellows and still have a few left."

"What kind of girls, M'sieur Ferguson?"

"All kinds. I don't think he stops at either creed or color. And, by the way, I think he is casting his eyes towards Hilda. If he does, Jules, I think I am going to ask him to quit."

"Did you ever tell him to quit before, M'sieur Ferguson?"

"Oh, in New York," answered the boy, "it was different. I'll stand for his running after those kind of girls, because—well, there's no real goodness about that sort. But when he takes a poor, innocent girl like Hilda, who's been whipped

to a finish by her father, gets hold of her sympathies and then turns mean tricks, it's about time to quit. Eh, Jules?"

Young Ferguson was somewhat astounded by the warmth and vigor with which he suddenly found his hand gripped by Beaubien.

"You are a good man, M'sieur Ferguson," said Jules. "And now, listen to me, Jules Beaubien, who is talking to you and he knows what he says—Jules tells you that M'sieur MacDonald may get her sympathies, but this is once when he will never turn the trick."

Ferguson could read more in Jules' eyes than even his words had declared.

"I'm on," he said quietly. "And declare me in when the rumpus comes."

Hilda came out of the low, wide doorway of the rough log house to call the two young men to their supper. Ferguson responded to the summons on the jump, but Jules and Hilda lingered.

The tall young Canadian looked fondly down upon the slender, golden-haired girl.

"Where have you been all day, Jules?" she asked.

"Oh, I've just walked over to Lac le Sable. A good morning's tramp there and back,little Hilda."

"Why did you go?"

"Why? Ah, just a whim! The woods are exquisite now—all brown and gold. And this is the last touch of warm weather, this Indian summer."

"The last," said the girl, sadly. "And then the everlasting cold will come," she went on, shuddering. "Night after night and day after day we will be shut up in the house, and never hear anything but the moaning of the pines and the crack of the frost and the yelp of some wolf scratching at the door for food."

"Hilda," interrupted Jules gently, sympathetically.

"And there'll never be any sun," continued the girl. "And it will always be dark, and the nights will be long. And all the time my father will be looking at me with his queer, cold gray eyes and telling me that my hair is yellow and my soul is black! Oh, God," she cried, with a sudden undertone of moaning and despair. "I can't stand it."

"Petite amie," said Jules quickly, soothingly, "there is a fitness in all things. This all means a road to somewhere—some place for rest and love. Only be very, very careful, little girl. Don't let your impatience hurt you. Sometimes I think all is for the good when one is good, and all is for the bad when one is bad. And, Hilda, you are good. I, Jules Beaubien, who am speaking to you now and who knows, say your soul is white and always will be white."

She lifted her young, graceful head and impulsively took his hand.

"'Mon ami,' Jules, you say, means 'my friend.' Teach me to say 'my one friend,' and I shall always say it to you."

"Mon cher ami."

"Mon cher ami," she repeated tenderly. They stood in silence.

"Why," asked Jules, happening to look downward at her other hand, in which a magazine was clasped, "what is that book?"

"It is the first one I ever saw—a magazine that Mr. MacDonald gave me. I've read it through twice, and I think it is the most beautiful thing that I ever saw in the world—even more beautiful than the 'Lady of the Lake.'"

"Ah! What would you do if you ever saw a news stand in Montreal, Quebec or Buffalo where there are hundreds of those?" Jules took up the magazine and scanned its pages. "These are pretty pictures, eh?"

"Actresses," said the girl. "And you know

that Mr. MacDonald knows nearly all of them himself."

"Maybe he told all about them, eh?"

"He did. What a wonderful man he is!"

"You like him very much, Hilda?"

"I don't know," she said, and the doubtful wag of her yellow head was very girlish. "Sometimes I do, and sometimes I'm almost afraid. He tells me all about that wonderful country beyond the pines and the mountains, things I never even heard of, things a woman's heart aches for. No one ever took the trouble to tell me before."

"Maybe, Hilda, it is not good to tell one about a country one cannot reach."

"Perhaps it is not, but Jules—"

"Yes."

"You—you don't have to live up here in the snow, away from everything, in the ice, the cold and the dreary woods. You've been in Montreal,

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Winnipeg, Quebec and even to the United States, and you have money. You told me your father left it to you. Why do you stay here—away from everything?"

"A man's heart, Hilda," answered the young Canadian, "calls him where it will, and he can give no reason. I have been told that some love the song of the sea, and some the song of the cities; that some men can live only where there are thousands of men, and other men cannot live except when feeling the roll of the ocean under their feet. But me—I am a French-Canadian. For six generations we have borne our children close to nature. Their lullaby at night has been the moaning of the pine and the birch, and the morning song has been that of a thousand birds. To me, Hilda, the forest speaks as my comrade; the bleak barrens welcome me to fight them. The snow, the cold, the ice, the dogs, the sledge,—they're all a part of

my heart. The North has been my only bride, and she is always young, with a smile on her face."

"Yes, yes, Jules; I know and I can understand how you feel. And maybe I might feel that way, too, if my hair wasn't yellow and my father was kind."

"Hilda! Hilda!" called the harsh voice of McTavish from within the house.

"But he is not kind, and he never will be," sobbed the girl. "I must go, Jules—Jules, mon cher ami!"

Love there was in the eyes of Jules, and a great sadness withal, as he looked after her intently. And so he stood lost in reverie, and all was silent about him. Twilight had fairly darkened into night. A faint, fragrant wind-song murmured through the pines.

A touch on Jules's shoulder caused him to turn swiftly. It was to see Baptiste—the rough

uncouth, affectionate comrade of the long man-hunt in the forests.

"You," exclaimed Jules huskily, "I have something to tell you. Listen!"

"Oui."

"You remember Annette?"

Baptiste moved back as if struck in the face.

"Oui, Annette, Annette!"

"We have not spoken her name in two years, Ba'tiste. But now I am going to speak it. Always we have thought of the man, and that sometime, Ba'tiste, we would find him. Is it not so?"

"Yes, yes; it is so."

"I have found him, Ba'tiste!"

"Thees man—you have fin' heem?" whispered Baptiste, and murderous fury gleamed in the eyes that had been so calm and doglike.

"MacDonald," said Jules briefly.

"Sacred God!" Baptiste's hand went to his

belt and his knife gleamed out of its scabbard. He would have rushed straight into the house but that Beaubien caught him.

"Non," said Jules commandingly. "This is my business. Annette, she is my sister. But it is not time yet. He is trying to do the same thing again." Jules nodded toward the house. "Hilda."

"Sacred God!" whispered Baptiste.

"Ba'tiste, soon this time of killing—it will come. I am Annette's brother. I love Hilda. My chance, Ba'tiste, is the first chance. But, mon ami, if I do not make one great, grand success —then you—you do the rest. Understand?"

"Keel?"

"Yes."

"I onnerstan'."

"That is good, Ba'tiste. Now I go to my supper—calmly—calmly—oh, Ba'tiste!"

The faint moonlight showed the great, hulking

form of Baptiste huddled in prayer by the pine tree seat, his face turned toward the vast loneliness and darkness of the forest as if in the murmuring winds he read an answer to his supplication.

"O good God," Baptiste, who had worshipped little Annette, was saying, "O good God! Please, please let Ba'tiste keel thees man."

CHAPTER VII

CONSCIENCELESS

Even Jules, fully aroused as he was to the infamous design that MacDonald had against Hilda, would hardly have been able to credit the heartless villainy of the scheme that was maturing in the mind of the subtle and sophisticated satyr.

The mind of Jules, despite his little look into the life of cities as a student, could know no such consummately conscienceless plan as MacDonald was evolving.

Men far more knowing of the world than Jules, in closer contact with its coils than he had ever been, might indeed pass their whole lives without meeting such a monstrous type as MacDonald.

In New York he belonged to a small coterie of men about whose doings there were merely

cautious whispers from time to time, and these whisperings were hardly believed. Exposure had never thrown a full light on this set of men and brought them under the withering fire of public indignation and legal punishment.

Practically they defied exposure, for there was none in this coterie but was like MacDonald, a man of big achievement, of fame and wealth, and therefore highly potential in their influence with such public authorities as could have beaten down and raided their dens of infamy and brought them fully out to bear the shame and scorn that was their due.

Noted lawyers, famous actors, a celebrated architect, two painters of international reputation and five or six men of leisure were in this little vicious set.

They were monsters of egoism. They believed that their genius placed them above the laws that were made to govern the society of ordinary men.

They were loudest in demanding the enforcement of laws that took the pickpocket or the highwayman, the burglar or the murderer to punishment; but for themselves and the pursuit of their strange appetites that sacrificed innocence as the most precious offering to their frightful gods, they claimed immunity.

They held the great majority of men who sought to live according to the codes of morality and religion as a horde of mere fools, frightened into decent living by ignorance and superstition. Virtue, purity and youth were the things they hunted to despoil, and they called up the cynicisms of every dissolute philosopher, ancient and modern, as their creed.

For their big achievements in art, science and commerce they demanded absolute license in private life as a reward. Or at least such was the reward they took, with a smile for the horror of those who came to know their infamies.

They haunted the theatres, with loathsome eyes singly intent on discovering in the groups of dancing women one that was not quite a woman—one that still had the half-turned lines of girlhood and that wore really, behind the mask of rouge and powder, a countenance of real innocence.

For the snaring of such a one as this—some temperamental little creature bewildered by the glitter of the light—there was nothing they would not do in lavish expenditure. To such youthful creatures, chosen as their victims, they gave jewels for slender necks, glittering rings for little hands, beautiful gowns for slender forms, and dazzling supper parties with tinkling music and sparkling wine.

These were the things they gave, and these things were the luxurious forerunners of the corruption that they invariably effected.

Of triumphs of this sort MacDonald could boast many. And he did boast. That was part of

the sport in this group and part of their pride as well. It was a decoration that they sought in the estimation of one another—that they should be regarded as ingenious, remarkable men, too far above the world's common estimates to endure any of the limitations of the ordinary perpetrators of vice, such as an uneasy conscience, stinging remorse, or indeed any conscience or remorse at all.

But MacDonald had another series of tales to tell this admiring group of immoral yet brilliant men. He had triumphs of the wilderness that they envied him—that some even tried to imitate.

The fascination of the human game to be found in remote places—girls like Annette and Hilda, who had the slender beauty that these men worshipped, who had the pure-eyed, pure-lipped innocence that was the great incentive—was as maddening hasheesh to the senses of these despoilers.

And so when MacDonald had told Jules that, after all, it was quite the best thing that could have happened to Annette when she died in the blizzard, wandering mad with grief and shame, to be found later horribly mutilated by wolves that had not respected the white pall the flying snow had swept above her, he fully meant it.

All that he regretted was that her youth and beauty were gone from his enjoyment forever. Of her soul he never even thought. Of her sufferings—well, she was of the humble, poor creatures of the earth whom some omniscient scheme had doomed to be one of those that suffer.

She had served charmingly to replace the absent studio parties. He was grateful for a romance of the pine-scented forests, after the vitiating orgies of the romances among exotic perfumes.

In the same way his thoughts now turned to Hilda. That her father guarded her with an ever-

suspicious eye but made the pursuit more interesting; that the girl herself was innately good and would have to be won by the most consummate of his wiles but lent fascination, and that the young, handsome, brisk Beaubien was his rival but added zest to the chase and lent the sport its element of danger.

When MacDonald contemplated Jules as a factor that might bring an ugly, violent chapter into the romance, it did not affect his purpose. Just as this remarkable man combined with high intellectual talents a brute's ferocity of passion, so also he had the bodily strength and physical courage of a brute.

He compared his depth of chest and width of shoulders with the lithe muscularity of Beaubien, and decided that in the event of a struggle the result would be in his own favor.

Yet he did not very seriously figure that there would be any such outcome. In his scheme to

possess the girl he would act quickly. He would, by a series of swift events, outgeneral Beaubien, and while the young Canadian was left wondering just how it all had happened, the prize of Hilda's possession would be his, and he would hurry with her to New York, where she would be helpless, and where, innately good or innately bad, he would own her. Own her body. As for her soul—MacDonald smiled to himself. If there were such things as souls her soul might take care of itself.

Of the arch wickedness of the subtle scheme he had devised to make the girl his property he thought nothing at all save in self-congratulation at its great cleverness.

The very morning after the discovery by Beaubien that MacDonald, who sought Hilda's ruin, was none other than the betrayer of Annette and the man whom he and Baptiste had sworn to kill, MacDonald had lingered behind the party

as it set out from the house, to pour new allurements of brilliant talk into Hilda's ears regarding the wonders and the charms of the great, bright cities far beyond the dismal, giant, oppressive mountains.

And again toward evening he purposely returned ahead of the party and found Hilda as she was walking back to the house from the spring, the tin pail shimmering in the sunset light as it swung.

MacDonald laid a hand gently on her firm, round, young sun-browned arm.

"Hilda," he said, with his fine eyes looking tenderly at her.

"Yes?" she questioned, her red lips parting to return his friendly smile.

"Where are you going?"

"Why," she laughed, "that is rather plainly to be seen—into the house with this pail of water."

"Put it down a minute," he urged. "There

is something important that I would say to you."

She obeyed.

"Have you thought over what I said to you this morning?" he continued.

"About going away?"

"Yes."

"Yes, yes," said the girl earnestly, as she brushed back a strand of glistening golden hair that had loosened from the tight combing and was flaunting jauntily in the sunlight. "Oh, yes, I have thought it all over. I have thought of little else, Mr. MacDonald—little else but the wonderful things you have told me of the world that is to be found beyond the hills."

"You have thought it over carefully, Hilda?"

"Yes, carefully."

MacDonald raised his hand to her shoulder. He regarded her with a fond eye for the graceful beauty that was only slightly suggested under

the lines of the loose, rough, blue serge blouse and skirt that she wore.

"Well," he asked at the end of this survey, "what is your decision?"

The girl instinctively turned to look back into the brown and gold forest, whither she had gone and spent an hour of that day in its helpful solitude in prayer for guidance.

"I—I don't know," she said to MacDonald.

"Why 'don't know'?" he demanded, somewhat impatiently.

The girl stared at her clasped hands. Her brow was marked with thought, but her thoughts were flooding confusedly in her pretty head.

"Only that, Mr. MacDonald; just I don't know."

MacDonald smiled as one who would humor a queer child.

"Well, you want to go, don't you?"

"Yes; yes, I want to go," she replied quickly.

"And certainly," he said, laughing low at the thought, "you are not afraid of me."

"No," said the girl with unexpected quietness and decision, "I am not afraid of you."

"Well, then, little Hilda, what makes you hesitate? You say you want to go. You have told me that your life here is utterly unhappy. I have told you all the joy and knowledge and beauty that are to be found where I am willing to take you, and yet when I ask you if you are ready to go, you can only answer 'I don't know.'"

"She looked up at him, and her smile was an acknowledgment that his impatience was not without some right of foundation.

"Do you mean to go soon?" she asked.

"Quite soon."

"How?"

"Do you mean exactly how soon?"

"No; not that," she pursued. "Quite soon

means in a little while. But what I mean is how —how are we to go?"

"I don't exactly know what you mean by 'how?'"

"I mean are we going to run away at night—run away at night and have people talk? You know there was my mother. She ran away at night and people talked, and always have talked, and my father curses her memory. Is it going to be that way with us?"

"And if it were?" demanded MacDonald suddenly and boldly.

Her reply came as directly as his question. First her fingers slipped up and disengaged the hand that had put a fervent pressure on her arm.

"Then I would not go," said Hilda. "It is an awful thing to stay here, now that I am getting old enough to know and to understand. But if I have to live here just this way all my life, I'll try to live as happily as I can. I will do my

best. But, Mr. MacDonald, I would never run away. I would never do that and have my father say that my soul was black and that I was wicked."

"I had not meant to ask you to do that, Hilda," came MacDonald's voice in soft remonstrance. "I was not meaning that at all. But what, Hilda, if your father should say all right?"

Her big, clear blue eyes lifted to meet MacDonald's, and there was sheer amazement in them.

"My father would not say all right," she said positively.

"I am asking you, Hilda, what if he does say all right?"

"Ah," she said with a quick smile, "if he does say all right—if—"

"Then if he does say all right—if I convince him that it is the thing for you to do and for me to

do and for him to do—I say if I convince him, Hilda, what would you say then?"

MacDonald ended, sure of the reply that would fall from her lips. But he was disappointed, for Hilda, looking away from him into the dense woods, out of which she seemed to draw inspiration for her thoughts, said:

"Still, still, I don't know. But, whether I will or whether I won't, father must know everything. I am quite decided on that."

"So am I," MacDonald assured her. "I will see him to-day. Only, Hilda, you must leave the gaining of his consent to me entirely. Whatever arrangement I make, you must not ask him about it. He seems to hate you, and whatever he might be willing I should do he might withdraw his consent if he saw that it was going to make you very happy."

"I never ask father about anything," said the girl with calm bitterness.

"And you will go—go with me if he consents?"

"I don't know," she answered. "But you must see him."

"That's agreed, little Hilda. Here is my hand on it."

MacDonald grasped her hand. The pressure was so warm and so hard that it alarmed her. He drew her toward him, but from this she openly shrank.

Finally he released her hand. She hurried from him, regained the shining pail of clear spring water and made her way as quickly as possible into the house.

MacDonald sauntered slowly in after her. Confidence was written plainly in the poise of his head, the throw-back of his shoulders, the steadiness of the smile on his viciously marked mouth.

CHAPTER VIII

THE UNEXPECTED

At dinner that night MacDonald showed high spirits and brimming good nature, and, with a view to furthering his own plans, he recounted at length, in the hearing of old McTavish, some of the wonderful works of engineering that he had performed, and the results in wealth that had accrued to hundreds and thousands of people through opening to the world's markets countless communities, whose produce had formerly been pent up and wasted in the lonely valleys and mountains. He told of cities that had grown because of the magic that his scientific genius could perform.

McTavish, whose creed was that gold was the most precious of earthly possessions, listened until excitement over what he had heard, and

admiration for the man who had accomplished these great things, caused his old gray eyes to shine.

MacDonald, having produced the effect he sought, repaired to the main room of the house, which had been given over to him as an office and a study.

It was a big square room; the walls of rough logs. Here and there were crude mottoes and cruder pictures. The antlers of moose and caribou were over the doorways and the two large windows.

In the centre of the room was a large table. Its top had been planed and smoothed and polished, but its thick legs still bore the bark of the trees.

MacDonald was seated at this table.

He was busily figuring. His head was handsome with its big, broad forehead symbolizing mental power. He sat in a rude, cane-bottomed

chair. Some big, unpainted rockers were around the room. Bear hides served for mats and on one side of the wall the skin of a huge grizzly was nailed, a proud badge of McTavish's prowess, despite his advanced years.

MacDonald, absolutely engrossed in his work, had not noticed that young Ferguson was watching him from outside one of the windows. Young Ferguson was looking thoughtful himself. He knew that what he intended to do in the next few minutes would be received with very bad grace by his employer.

He knew that MacDonald's masterful nature would be inclined to sweep instantly aside anything that promised to be an obstacle to his plans, and that he, Ferguson, although the personal favorite of the engineer—who was fond of the lad for his humor and good nature—might expect to be treated as any other obstacle the minute he put himself in the way of the

engineer's schemes, romantic or otherwise.

But there were certain old-fashioned teachings that were strong in the boy's heart. The innocence of woman was something that he held sacred, and Hilda was so absolutely innocent, so wholly unspoiled! Her disposition was so sweet that even her father's constant harsh treatment had not made of her a sullen creature. Her response to the least kindliness was as pure and sweet as the opening of a flower.

Young Ferguson therefore rapped the ashes out of his pipe and, entering the house, knocked at the door of the room and entered.

"Hello, governor," he said affably.

"Hello, Fergy," said the engineer cordially.

"What are you doin'?" asked the lad with a familiarity that MacDonald had long ago accorded him.

"Working on these maps, kid. By the way, I expect Anderson and the rest of the surveying

party up here to-morrow or the next day, and when they come you can go with them to the south, to run the new line from the fork of the Little Bear River."

"And what are you going to do?" young Ferguson asked casually.

"You can leave me here," said MacDonald shortly.

"What do you want to stay here for?"

At this query from Ferguson, MacDonald looked up in displeased surprise.

"I said you could leave me here, I guess that's enough, Ferguson."

"Oh, all right," said Ferguson, with one of his disarming smiles, "if that's the way you want to look at it."

MacDonald didn't thaw.

"That's just the way I want to look at it."

The tone was final. It was intended for a dismissal. The engineer returned to his papers,

Ferguson, but we've got along pretty well. I like to have you with me, and you've always had the redeeming quality of minding your own business. That's an unusual virtue, my boy. It is your one great asset. Hang on to it."

Ferguson shook his head.

"That's the trouble, governor."

"What?"

"It's slipping."

"What's slipping?"

"My asset."

MacDonald finally cast aside his papers and stood up.

"What's the trouble, Ferguson?"

"Well, governor, I find myself with a keen temptation to mind somebody else's business. In fact, I've committed myself."

"Whose business?"

"Yours."

"About what?" frowned MacDonald.

"The girl—Hilda," said the lad.

"In love?"

"No; in earnest."

A sneer crept across MacDonald's lips.

"Going to be a hero?"

"No; going to try to be a white man."

"I wonder if you've let it slip out of your mind in this business, Ferguson, that you are working for me? If I were you I wouldn't."

"No," replied the boy doggedly; "I've added all that up, governor—the job, the money, and what it might cost if I butt in—and still, still I've got a yearning instinct in my heart that tells me I'm going to lose that asset of mine—that asset of mine that you say is the most valuable thing about me. Yes, I feel that I'm apt to lose that asset."

MacDonald stared at the boy. Here was an unexpected factor—a source of annoyance that he had not counted upon. Of course, it would be

Feurd to think that Ferguson, slip of an irresponsible lad that he was, could really do any decisive thing that might spoil his scheme for possessing himself of Hilda. But the incident was unexpected, and MacDonald would rather have Ferguson for a friend.

To a man of MacDonald's nature it is disagreeable to have anybody voluntarily leave association with him. It hurt his vanity to think that with his fame and magnetism and wealth any one should voluntarily withdraw from the privilege of this association.

"Don't be silly, Fergy," he said in a somewhat conciliatory voice. "I hate to see you go wrong. A lot of men in their time have tried to interfere in my business and it didn't get them much—bigger men than you, Fergy; and I guess you know I'm throwing no bluffs about that. I always get what I go after," he continued, with an eye set steadily upon the face of Ferguson;

"always, one way or another. And I'm going to do that all my life, my boy."

Ferguson returned the deliberate stare. He said slowly, but with great underlying earnestness:

"I've never been able to quite figure you out, governor. Most of the time you have been almost white, but some of the time you have been as black as night. I never mixed up with you in New York when you pulled off those parties and drunks with some of your select friends. Girls of that kind never get to me very strong. I've always had, somewhere in my system, a streak of decency that calls my bluff every time I try to be rotten. I guess that's my mother's personality playing hard for me to win when I backslide."

The old sneer came to MacDonald's bad mouth.

"Is this a sermon, Ferguson?"

"No, not a sermon. Just a quiet tip."

"Give it to me," said MacDonald, with an effort at toleration.

"Don't you break Hilda's heart," said the boy quickly and with an energy that made his words snap. "And don't you try to turn any funny tricks, governor, because on the square, you can't get away with it."

MacDonald laughed ill-naturedly.

"You're willing to be the little boy who is coming in at the critical moment to say, 'Ha! unhand her, villain!'—eh?"

"No,I'm not. Although at a show-down I'd help."

"Who is going to be the man, then?"

"Jules Beaubien."

"What about him?" said MacDonald, and there was a noticeable slackening of the scornfulness in his voice

"He's on."

"Jealous?"

"Call it what you want, governor. But the first time you make a wrong move, you're going to get it from him, and you are going to get it good."

"What can he do?"

"Just wipe you out of existence with as much compunction as I'd snap a straw."

With a gesture of impatience, the engineer exclaimed:

"Ferguson, you're funny! This Frenchman is in the same boat that I am. The only difference is that so far I've got the best of it, and he knows it. Don't get nervous about me, young man. You are a little too young to be giving me advice. Just go right on minding your own business, and that asset of yours will become more valuable every year."

"All right; all right," said the boy. "But just remember that I've tipped you, and—another thing. I want to be open with you, governor.

If a show-down comes off—well, I've declared myself with the Frenchman and his end of the game, job or no job. That's flat."

MacDonald raised his big head in astonishment.

"You re a sentimental ass, Ferguson."

His declaration made all Ferguson's old boyish irresponsibility of demeanor instantly return.

"That's got a damned fool beat," he laughed, "and let it go at that."

CHAPTER IX

THE DUPE

There was a knock on the door of the big room and the shock-haired head of McTavish looked inside. Indignation mantled in the rugged old countenance at sight of young Ferguson, but seeing that MacDonald was also there, McTavish entered.

"Hello!" said the gay Ferguson. "There's the old Bonnie Briar Bush with his little bunch of Scotch heather."

"Meester MacDonald," exploded the Scot, "I will nae stand the impudence o' this young mon!"

"All right, old Santa Claus," laughed Ferguson.

"Santa Claus again!" roared McTavish. "Oot o' me house wi' ye!"

Ferguson hurried to the door and bowed.

"At once—but back at supper time, Roderick Dhu."

"Meester MacDonald, if ye do not stop that young deevil—"

"Ferguson," cut in the engineer, "you'll have to drop that sort of thing. Understand?"

"Oh, all right, governor." In the same breath, however, he said to McTavish: "Don't you care, King Jamie. When you and I and Sir Walter Scott and Bobby Burns meet in Edinburgh next summer, what a great time we'll have."

"Awa' wi' ye!" stormed the old man.

"I'll buy you a drink and stake you to a barber," said Ferguson, politely.

"Ferguson, drop it," commanded MacDonald, who little wanted the ruffling of McTavish's disposition at this juncture in his schemes.

"All right, governor. So long," said the boy, and bowed himself out of the room with a maddening grin at the hard old woodsman.

McTavish struggled to regain his composure. When he had done so, he said:

"Meester MacDonald, I respect yoursel' and yer poseetion, but I canna' stand the impudence o' the young jackanapes. He'll drive me mad wi' his insults."

"You mustn't mind him, Mr. McTavish," spoke MacDonald sympathetically. "He doesn't mean anything—really. If you paid no attention to him he'd soon stop. But I'll speak to him when he comes back; you may depend upon it."

"If he dinna stop he canna' stay in me hoose. He's past all patience."

"I'll have him stopped. I promise you that."

"Ye're a guid mon, Mr. MacDonald, and I'll tak' yer word. I canna hae nae mon makin' jokes o' me before me ain flesh an' blood, worthless as she is."

"You mean Hilda?"

'Who else could I mean but Hilda?"

Who else, indeed? MacDonald had deliberately seized the opportunity to bring the name of the girl into his talk.

"I see," he said. And then, quite slowly and earnestly, "I want to have a talk with you about her sometime, Mr. McTavish."

"She nae worthy o' discussion, Meester MacDonald. She and her mither hae been the blight o' me life."

"I'm sorry, sir. But now—just now—I want to talk some business to you, and afterwards—afterwards, I really have something serious to propose to you regarding Hilda. But first the business."

"Business?"

"Why, yes, Mr. McTavish. I can show you how you can make a lot of money. You might as well get it as anybody else. I wouldn't have the time to take advantage of the chance myself, and you've won my friendship, Mr. McTavish."

"That's guid o' ye. And it's guid to get a chance to make money," answered the Scot, cordially and eagerly. "I hae some money. Meester MacDonald, but a mon is no mon who does nae want more."

The engineer walked over to the table and selected one of the blue maps. He handed it to the old man.

"You see this rough sketch?"

"I do."

"You know what it is?"

"Aye—what is it?"

"A map."

"I ken thot, mon, but the world is large and there are many maps. What's this?"

"Well, now, I know you are a little skeptical about this railroad, Mr. McTavish."

"'Tis a fool's dream," said the old man bluntly.

"Hardly," observed MacDonald, with a dignity

that he knew how to make impressive, "unless you put me down for a fool."

"Nae, nae," McTavish hastened to reply. "Ye're a shrewd mon, Meester MacDonald, and a guid one, and what ye say I'll believe, though 'tis hard to credit that ye'll be able to put the railroad through all this wilderness o' mountains."

The engineer went over to the old man, took the map from his hand and laid it on the table. With a pencil to make indications on the drawn plan, he said:

"Well, see here. There's the fork of the Little Bear River. You know the country, do you not?"

"As I do mesel', and even better."

"How better?"

"The country nae changes, and sometimes the Scotch do. 'Tis their difference from the Swedes."

"You don't seem to like Swedes?" observed MacDonald.

"I dinna' like Swedes wi' their yellow hair any more than I like porcupines wi' their stingin' quills. I hae one in me own family."

MacDonald could not resist the temptation.

"What—porcupines?"

"Nae, mon," answered McTavish, all seriously, "a Swede—Hilda, the guid-fer-nothing girl. But I'd as soon nestle a porcupine to me breast." McTavish glowered. "Well—gang alang wi' the business ye were tellin' me aboot."

MacDonald laid his pencil point on the map again.

"This railroad that you are so doubtful about is sure to be built up to this point—understand."

"Aye."

"The money is ready; the success assured. It may be one, two or three years, and even four, but sooner or later it's bound to come."

"Aye, lad—ye seem to be speakin' the truth?"

MacDonald ran his pencil along the map.

"That land at the fork of the river is free from timber."

"As bare as the palm o' me hand."

"Can you get that land and file a deed?"

"I dinna ken why I should do that."

"If I show you the way and how, will you do it?"

"For what reason?"

"When the road goes through, the possession of that land will make you a rich man."

McTavish looked at him with liveliest curiosity.

"Aye, lad, aye. Tell me aboot it."

"Well, can't you see for yourself? The land isn't worth a dollar a square mile now, but with the road it will be immensely valuable. I expect this project to make you very, very rich. I just want to show you that I appreciate your kindness and hospitality, and I'm going to let you in on the deal. Then you will have a lot of money."

"How much, laddie, how much?"

The Scot's old heart was beginning to beat very fast.

"Oh, I don't know exactly. Maybe a couple of hundred thousand dollars."

McTavish half leaped from his chair.

"Twa hoondred thousand dollars!" he cried, and sank back in his seat.

"That much anyway—certainly—and maybe more."

McTavish gripped his chair and narrowed his eyes. He swallowed a big lump in his throat.

"Ye're not makin' jokes wi' me, like the young jackanapes who calls me King Jamie and Santa Claus?" he demanded.

"Not in the least, Mr. McTavish. I, sir, have proper respect for white hairs, and am really a friend of yours. Will you accept it?"

McTavish arose and laid his big, rough hand on the table.

"I weel, mon," he said slowly, adding, "'Tis me dooty as a Scotchmon."

"Then that's settled, and there's my hand."

McTavish took the hand eagerly.

MacDonald had angled his bait skilfully, and the mercenary McTavish grew almost senile in his emotion of gratitude, as he clasped hands with the man who had promised to make him wealthy beyond any dream that he had ever had.

"Meester MacDonald, ye're a guid mon and a wise one," he said, with a voice that was unsteady. "When ye came to my hoose I had a mind to drive ye awa' to save ye from the yellow hair and black heart o' the girl Hilda. 'Twas her mither's aim to lure men to destruction, and the girl has the signs o' inheriting it. But ye're a sensible mon, and nae woman can wreck yer life. I hae nae fear for the young jackanapes. The Lord knows his head is as empty as his stomach."

McTavish released the hand of MacDonald slowly. And MacDonald, as the old man turned away and sought the comfort of a big rocker stole a glance at the huge, age-bent figure, and for an instant indulged himself to the extent of allowing a smile to steal across his lips.

Such moments as these, when his wiles carried him to a triumph of deception, were enjoyable to the conscienceless engineer. He decided that now was the psychological time to successfully fix the trap for the capture of Hilda, the chosen victim of his evil desires.

"I wanted to speak to you about Hilda," said MacDonald in a low, friendly voice. He walked over to the big rocker and stood behind McTavish's chair. In this position his back was towards the two big windows that faced out upon the forest, with the silver river below the slope.

And so it happened that words that he intended solely for the ears of McTavish were heard by

other ears. So it happened that Jules Beaubien, with cold eyes of hatred, stood at the window sill and came to a realization of a deeper, more cunning villainy in the nature of the engineer than even he had suspected.

Jules and Baptiste, sauntering in front of the house, had their attention attracted to the interior of the lighted room and saw there MacDonald and McTavish in attitudes that bespoke the happening of something important.

Baptiste impulsively brought his rifle down from his shoulder. Jules frowned and motioned his displeasure, and Baptiste replaced the weapon as he had been carrying it before.

Beaubien followed that with a gesture of dismissal that sent Baptiste to the pine tree seat to smoke his pipe in a sullen silence, and to dream of the sweetness of a revenge that would find himself and MacDonald in mortal combat.

At the window sill Jules, left alone, hesitated

for an instant, but finally, with a tightening of his lips and a shrug of his shoulders, he moved quickly and silently forward and leaned his head partly over the sill. In the cause of saving the girl he loved he frankly decided to play eavesdropper.

"Ye want to talk to me o' Hilda?" he heard McTavish ask. "What hae ye to say o' the girl? Be brief and," added the old man with a ferocious frown, "if she's been misconducting hersel', dinna protect her, but gie me the truth."

MacDonald moved forward and turned slightly so that he might fully study the profile of McTavish, whereas the old man would have little opportunity to look into the countenance of his companion.

"What are your plans for her, Mr. McTavish?" The tone was gentle, kindly and betokened a half-paternal interest in the future of the girl herself.

"I hae nae plans for her, Mr. MacDonald," answered the Scot, still frowning. "Ye dinna ken the grief o' a faither's heart. Since the day she came from her mither, with the curse o' her yellow hair, she's been a burden to me soul. It's been the one thought o' me life to save her from eternal damnation. But now she's twenty-one, and—and—the deevil may take her any time."

MacDonald nodded sympathetically.

"I know how you must feel. I know just how you feel, Mr. McTavish." He laid his hand on the old man's shoulder. "But in the case of Hilda, I think, sir, I can find a way for you out of your trouble."

"Take care, mon," replied the Scot, "that ye come not yersel' under the spell o' Hilda."

MacDonald smiled and slowly shook his head.

"No chance of that, Mr. McTavish. I'm —well—I'm too sensible. I'm an American, but my mother came from Scotland."

It was a neat stroke. It drew McTavish even closer.

"That's guid; that's guid," said the old Scot, with nods of his hoary head. "Ye're too fine a mon not to be soom Scotch."

"Hilda is up here alone with you, and, as you say, she's twenty-one. The railroad will soon be up here, and there will be many men. Either you will have to move far up North, give up this home you've had for so many years, or Hilda will be placed in the way of temptation."

"True for ye. And I dinna trust her."

"How long is it since you've been to the cities or the States?" asked MacDonald.

"A score o' years."

"I am not a young man, Mr. McTavish. Old enough to be a father, but I've never married."

" 'Tis a sensible head ye hae on yer shoulders."

"I have no brothers or sisters," continued the

engineer, "none in the world but a fine old Scotch mother in New York. She's just such a woman as you are a man, and with the same ideas."

"Thin she must be Scotch," said the old man, approvingly.

"And now you say that Hilda, after all your years of training, is in danger. I agree with you. My mother is a devout member of the church, and in her old age nothing would please her more than to save a soul like Hilda's and cheat the devil," pursued MacDonald, his rich voice sounding very sincere and earnest and reverent.

"She's a guid woman. My mither was the same. Some weemen are guid," grudgingly admitted McTavish, only to add immediately, "but not many—not many."

"When the railroad comes here you will be busy making money," resumed the engineer. "You will move down to your land and you will

have your business to attend to. You can't watch Hilda then all the time."

"True for ye. 'Twill gi' the deevil a chance. But a mon should get rich. He should; should he not?"

"Of course. Well, now, Mr. McTavish, having thought of my good old mother and of Hilda's soul, it has come to my mind that my mother could devote every minute of her time to Hilda. It would be a holy work, and my dear mother would like it. Why not, Mr. McTavish—" MacDonald's hand pressed heavily and warmly on the bent shoulders of Hilda's father—"why not let Hilda come with me to my home and there my mother could complete the work that you have carried on so well up to the present time?"

McTavish studied the knuckles of his big, gaunt hands. He wagged his head.

"Tak' care, mon, ye dinna bring a wanton under yer roof."

"I realize all that," agreed MacDonald, "but you have done your full duty. You have buried yourself in the wilderness for twenty years. You have brought up Hilda according to your belief and system. In your old age you should have some of the pleasures of life. As soon as the railroad is built you will have a great deal of money. You could come and visit us and see Hilda, and then you could go back to Scotland and go over all your early days."

This was the master stroke. None is so canny as the Scot. None possesses so deeply fibered the love of native land. Back of hard shells, of mercenary hearts, even a Scot forever preserves soft places of sentiment for the old folks at home.

"Back to Scotland—back to Scotland," murmured the old man, and the hardness of his face softened until there was actual tenderness there. "Back to Scotland! Ah,

'twould be grand, mon, 'twould be grand!"

"You'd like it, eh?" said MacDonald, keeping the tone of his voice in harmony with the old man's tenor of thought.

"Mon," almost sobbed McTavish, "I've dreamt o' Scotland these twenty years. I've dreamt o' it in the long cold nights o' the winter, and under the pines in the summer time the wind has sung her sweet, dear ballads. I hae nae closed me eyes but I've seen the Highlands wi' their sheep and heather, and me heart's near cracked at the thought o' me bonnie land. Scotland, mon! 'Tis the thought o' her that's kept the life in me body these long, lonely years."

The old gray eyes, that characteristically were cold or glittering with hatred of wrongs morosely cuddled in a narrow mind, were wet now with tears.

"Then it's time you went back," said MacDonald, his hand still on the old man's shoulder,

"time you went back. And this is the only way. It is your duty as far as Hilda's concerned. You must realize that."

McTavish arose. He faced MacDonald.

"An' ye'll take Hilda to yer mither, an' ye'll keep her from the weeman who bore her an' watch her soul as ye would yer ain sister, an' went to hell?"

"I'll do all that, Mr. McTavish," returned the other man solemnly. "I've been a little careless in my duties to the church, and the time has come in my life when I feel that I should do something to make up for my neglect. This opportunity seems to have been sent to me. Why, one almost might say it had been sent to me from heaven. Here is my hand, McTavish, and here is my word. It is your duty. It is my duty. Will you do it?"

Nothing could have been more consummate than the assumption of candor and sympathy and

noble purpose on the countenance of MacDonald. Eagerly, completely charmed, the Scot made reply:

"I will, sir; God bless ye, I will."

With hands together they were standing, when MacDonald suddenly drew away.

"Some one is smoking a cigarette," he said hastily.

Turning his head, he beheld Beaubien, his elbow on the sill and the smoke rising in a slender spiral from the cigarette between his slender fingers.

For several seconds the men eyed each other with an intense, unblinking stare.

CHAPTER X

"STAND ON YOUR FEET AND FIGHT"

The sight of Jules looking in at the window, the smoke of the tell-tale cigarette rising from his fingers, and the realization that came to MacDonald that the young Canadian had probably been there for some time and had heard in its entirety the elaborate scheme of deception for which old McTavish had fallen so easy and fully a victim caused the engineer's eye to flash in anger.

But he realized that this was no time for an open rupture with Beaubien, so he forced down his anger and his countenance slowly assumed an expression of good-humored toleration and amusement as he regarded Jules.

Young Beaubien tossed away his cigarette and returned the smile significantly—with what

depth of significance, MacDonald, of course, was not able to read.

It was old McTavish who first spoke. The excitement caused by MacDonald's propositions —by which he was to be made a wealthy man and Hilda taken care of by a religious Scotch woman, while he should be given an opportunity to realize his dearest hope, returning to Scotland to pass his last days—still had possession of the old man.

"Jules, hae ye been there long?" he asked.

"Some time, M'sieur M'Tavish," answered Beaubien. And he looked again at MacDonald.

"And ye heard?"

"Some things, M'sieur McTavish."

The old man lumbered over to the window, waving his big arm.

"Mon, mon!" he cried. "Meester MacDonald hae found a way for the salvation o' Hilda an' the means o' me goin' to Scotland before I dee."

"Oui, M'sieur McTavish," said Jules, smiling.

"He's to tak' Hilda to his mither's, who's Scotch," went on the old man, garrulous in his happiness, "and who's to bring her up accordin' to God and the Presbyterian Church. And he's doon more—he's to mak' me rich. Jules, Meester MacDonald that you see here, he is a guid mon, Jules, a guid mon."

McTavish passed his big fingers through his shock of yellowish white hair and turned toward MacDonald.

The engineer had walked about the room a little uneasily. He had read plainly in the eyes of Beaubien how thoroughly his deception was understood in that quarter. He was anxious to get the old man away.

"I'll be sendin' the girl to ye this minit," said McTavish to him earnestly, "an' ye can tell her yersel' o' this grand plan ye hae for her an' me."

"All right, I'll be here," answered MacDonald.

The Scot walked toward the door leading to the other rooms of the big log house of the forest, and there he turned and admonished the engineer.

"Dinna be too gentle wi' her, lest she mistake her dooty to yer guid mither."

He left the room.

MacDonald looked quickly back to where Jules stood in the window. He smiled broadly at the Canadian.

"Won't you come in?" he asked.

"Merci," replied Jules, and passing out of sight of the window he soon presented himself at the door of the room and entered.

MacDonald seated himself at the table.

"Sit down," he said to Jules.

"I like best to stand."

MacDonald frowned.

"You were listening?" he demanded.

"That is true," said Beaubien easily.

"In my country," said the older man, "they call that eavesdropping."

Beaubien did not wince.

"It is the same by any other name," he admitted calmly.

"Do you think it was right?" came the nettled question of MacDonald.

Beaubien shrugged his shoulders.

"What is it you say—all is fair in love and war?" he answered.

MacDonald leaned back and regarded Jules contemptuously.

"So," he said, "we're still rivals, eh?"

"That may be true."

MacDonald laughed openly.

"Well," he chuckled, "well, you can see what chance you've got."

"You," said Jules quietly, "lied to M'sieur McTavish."

MacDonald waved his hand in deprecation.

"That's an ugly word," he observed, but in light, unconcerned tones. Where the advantage was so largely his, he could afford to be tolerant of a natural disappointment prompting Beaubien to irritation in his speech.

"It is an ugly word," assented the young man, "but it is so. You did lie."

"No, I didn't lie. I just followed that method of yours that you told about—I promised."

He grinned victoriously.

"If you get Hilda away from here, what will you do with her?" asked Jules.

"What would you do?" came MacDonald's question in return.

"That's my business."

"It is my business what I would do," MacDonald snapped back.

"That may be true, too, M'sieur MacDonald."

The engineer arose. He walked over and

stood in front of Beaubien, his stalwart legs apart, his hands behind his back. He looked up and winked in the other man's face.

"How do you like my little scheme, eh? Do you wonder I beat that Frenchman out of Annette?"

"No, I do not wonder. You are a great man at this little game."

MacDonald thought he discovered in this admission a striking down of the colors of Beaubien, believing as he did that the Frenchman's interest in the girl was as impure and villainous as his own.

"So," he observed, "I guess, Jules, my boy, you lay down. What?"

"I don't understand."

"I mean, do you quit and acknowledge that I've got the best of you?" He nodded and grinned.

"No, I do not do that, M'sieur MacDonald."

There was a certain quiet fervor in Beaubien's tone that wiped away the grin from MacDonald's lips.

"What are you going to do, then?" he demanded.

"Suppose," returned Beaubien, "I should go to M'sieur McTavish and—and—tell him the truth, and show him how you have lied?"

"You won't do that!" exclaimed MacDonald, sharply.

"Why not?"

"Because, Jules, I know you, and I like you, and I know you're too game to play the game against me that way."

"How is that?"

"See here," expostulated the engineer, "we both acknowledged this morning that we were after the same thing. You didn't in so many words, but in effect you did. And between two men who are trying to win a girl, the sportsman-

like way is not to carry tales or resort to any such baby methods, but to stand on your feet and fight, and lose as gracefully as you win."

Beaubien straightened up. He walked a step toward MacDonald.

"That is good. That is very good—what you have just now said—'stand on your feet and fight!'"

"Then you are still ready to fight, Jules?"

"I have always been ready to fight."

Under the quietness of the tone there was a vibrant sting. MacDonald heard it. He looked at the other man quickly. All the pleasantry was gone from his face. It was set and serious.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked angrily.

"What I said," replied Jules evenly.

Rage possessed MacDonald at the open defiance of Beaubien. The young Canadian had, with unexpected earnestness, seized upon Mac-

Donald's words that the proper method for two men who were rivals in a serious affair was for them to "stand on their feet and fight."

Jules had been perfectly cool in his retort that it was something that he was always ready to do. It was not that MacDonald feared him, but this would be an awkward moment for an open combat between them.

Jules himself had reasons for not wishing to precipitate the fight that he had decided must be inevitable between himself and this man, who had ruined the life of Annette and sent the simple child to her death in the snow—to her horrible end as food for the wolves.

The only difference between the thought of the two men as they faced each other was that Jules realized that this battle was to be to death. MacDonald, not knowing that he stood before the brother of Annette, and not realizing

the exalted character of the love of Jules for the golden-haired Hilda, regarded the matter in the light of a passing affray; but even as such he must now avoid it.

He walked over quietly to Jules.

"See here," said he, "are you going to get nasty about this?"

"I don't know what you mean by nasty," said Jules. He purposely put a gentleness in his tones that somewhat cooled the anger of the big engineer.

"Young Ferguson has talked with me," answered MacDonald significantly.

Jules rolled a cigarette.

"M'sieur Ferguson talks a great deal to everybody," he observed.

"He said that if—well, you know what I mean—Hilda and all that—that you would wipe me out of existence. I infer from that that you intend to raise a row here. Is that so?"

Very deliberately Jules blew a cloud of smoke from his cigarette.

"That must be M'sieur Ferguson's own idea. I have never told him that I would do that, or that I would raise a row. So you see that he had no right to say so."

MacDonald's manner displayed some relief.

"Then you stand with Hilda and me just where you stood this morning. Is that it?"

Jules weighed his answer. He had heard MacDonald's scheme of luring Hilda to New York, with the full consent of her father, obtained through the basest and wiliest of deception, and he had his own counterplans under way. It was hard for Jules, with his fingers tingling, not to deal the revenge or punishment that, under the primitive law of wild places, he had decided that MacDonald should in the end receive at his hands in fair and open fight.

But if the inevitable contest should happen

there and then, it would mean that Hilda would be left forever in the hands of her harsh father; for certainly the old man would kill his daughter rather than let her pass into the hands of the slayer of MacDonald—MacDonald, whose dazzling offer of riches, and further offer to place Hilda in the care of a fictitious Scotch mother, had raised the engineer to nothing less than a demigod in the eyes of the old man.

The delay of a few hours at least was necessary before Jules could effectively arrange for the flight of Hilda. So his reply to MacDonald was as reassuring as he could make it.

"I stand with Hilda and you just where I stood this morning, M'sieur MacDonald," he said.

"Good," said MacDonald, palpably much easier in mind. "You've played fair with me. I'll play fair with you."

"C'est bien," smiled Jules.

"The old man is at this minute sending Hilda to me, and——"

"I know."

"Of course. You heard, you beggar."

"That is so," said Jules, winking at the engineer.

"She is coming here to talk this over with me—to talk over going away with me."

MacDonald walked over to Jules and smiled in his big, genial fashion.

"Now, I'll tell you what I'll do."

"What will you do, M'sieur MacDonald?"

"I'll give you your chance to get her. I'll give you your chance to win her if you can," retorted the engineer with a ring of defiance issuing from his lips that were, however, still smiling. "I'll let you have the first talk with her," he added. "You can make love to her in your own way, and, understand, what I do afterward I'll do in my own way. But if Hilda likes

you best after you've talked with her I'll step down and out. But I'll tell you frankly, I don't think you've got a chance."

"Still," replied Beaubien with a slight bow, "I will take that chance."

"All right. You're on. Wait here. She'll come sooner or later, for her father has gone to find her and send her here. And, according to agreement, I'll keep away until you have finished your talk with her."

MacDonald walked to the door. He turned and laughed.

"Make the most of your chance, my boy, for it's a mighty slim one."

"I will do that, M'sieur MacDonald," answered Jules, with that same little bow that the other man had come to find rather annoying.

MacDonald stepped out of the house, placing his sombrero carelessly on the back of his head and buttoning his corduroy jacket as he went.

There was a little sharpness in the autumn wind. The sky had become overcast and the woods looked grim and black.

He lighted his pipe and strolled slowly down the woodland path. He smiled at the thought of Jules as his rival.

To be sure the handsome, smiling Beaubien was a most attractive fellow, and MacDonald could easily imagine the admiration and success that would attend the browned, lithe and romantic young woodsman down in the big city where he would move in contrast to the pallid, vitiated men whose lives were spent in physical confinement and under a constant mental drive to keep their shoulders up in the intense battle for successful careers in commerce and the professions.

But with Hilda—why, Jules was an old story with her. He must rank merely as a commonplace personality in her circle of interest, where,

on the other hand, he (MacDonald) had all the attraction of glittering novelty, with the stories of his fame that had reached the girl's ears, and of his wealth, and with stories that he himself had so glowingly recounted to her of the charms for women in the big cities—the theatres, fine gowns, jewels, lights and music, the countless bewildering fascinations.

And then, after all, if the unlikely thing did happen—if Hilda should announce her preference for Jules? There was old McTavish to reckon with.

McTavish was a factor that had been completely won. As between delivering his daughter to the care of the God-fearing Scotch mother whom the engineer had invented for the occasion, and handing her over to be the wife of a Frenchman—he who held the French in such complete contempt, though he was inclined rather to like Jules—McTavish would certainly render only one

decision, and that would be in favor of the plan in which MacDonald had made him believe. Whatever liking McTavish had for Jules was too superficial, MacDonald decided, ever to cause the old man to take sides with the young Canadian.

MacDonald halted in his walk. The path led down the mountain side, and suddenly across the dark valley there had sounded the sharp wail of a wolf. Sounding as it did in the darkness, it came as a call of evil presentiment. It made MacDonald shudder, and the next instant upbraid himself for permitting the thing to affect his nerves.

But there is that about the cry of the wolf—the long, mournful cadence with its tone of savagery and yet its note of fear—that vibrates on the strongest nerves most disagreeably.

MacDonald caught himself hoping that the occurrence of the night before would not be repeated. He had been awakened in the middle

of the night by a series of the wailing calls outside. Sometimes there was a single, sad, savage cry. At other times there rose the vicious voices of many wolves in a shivering chorus.

The cries, distant at first, had come nearer and nearer, and the noise had been so harrowing and shrill that all in the household had been awakened.

MacDonald had gone to the window as the howling pack came scurrying, tumbling, and with mouths agape, boldly out of the concealment of the trees and foliage and into the clearing in front of the house.

A great, dark, gray pack, they had rushed dizzily past his window, and by the moonlight one could plainly see the red of their open mouths and lolling tongues.

And MacDonald remembered that as he peered out of the window he had seen from another window in the low extension in the rear of the house, the face of Baptiste Le Grand peering up

at him. The great brown eyes in the broad, bearded face glittered almost as had the eyes of the passing wolves.

MacDonald had found himself wondering at the malevolence of the expression, when Baptiste had suddenly openly grinned at him and nodded.

The passing of the wolfpack gave Baptiste infinite satisfaction. It meant something to him that MacDonald did not know.

There was in it a sinister sign of the woods—a grisly superstition, religiously credited by the children of the forests.

MacDonald on this very night was to hear of this same grisly legend from the lips of Hilda; when, of course, he would sneer at it, as becomes a man whose mind is not the mind of a child.

But the simple mind of Le Grand rejoiced in the sign of the passing of the wolfpack. It made him the more certain that his enemy was not to escape retribution for the monstrous

cruelty of his actions toward Annette and his subsequent complete indifference toward the terrible death which had overtaken the child-mother.

There was another thing that MacDonald did not know, and that was that his every movement had been shadowed by Baptiste since the hour that he learned that this handsome, debonair man of the great, wondrous civilized city, thousands of miles away from the woods, was the moral murderer of the sweet and beautiful Annette, whom Baptiste had loved with all the great, primitive strength of the big heart in his broad body.

Baptiste feared that MacDonald might suspect or might accidentally come to learn of the identity of himself and Jules as the sweetheart and brother of the dead girl and, finding this out, abandon his schemes to possess Hilda, and seek safety in flight.

Such a move on his part Baptiste would have stopped with a Winchester unerringly aimed.

To-night, for the first time, MacDonald walked unwatched. And that was because the instant he had left the room telling Jules that he might have the first opportunity to lay his love at Hilda's feet, Beaubien had run quickly to the window and when the foe was out of hearing, had called to his faithful companion, who he knew would, according to the orders he had given him, be close at hand.

"Ba'tiste! Ba'tiste!"

A few seconds later Baptiste was in the room. His rifle was in his hand.

"What you want, Jules Beaubien?" he inquired.

CHAPTER XI

THE GREAT DESIRE

The swift, almost instant response of Le Grand to his call met with a smile from Jules.

"Always the faithful Ba'tiste Le Grand," he said affectionately. "Listen. You have the canoe all ready at the bank of the river?"

"Oui."

"Plenty of food?"

"Oui."

"Ready to go now?"

"Oui."

"Listen, Ba'tiste Le Grand, to Jules Beaubien and to my business."

The big, brown, doglike eyes of the sturdy Baptiste sought the face of Jules solemnly.

"Soon, maybe, Ba'tiste, there will be one great, big fight and MacDonald—"

"Chien!"

"He will try and take Mam'selle Hilda away."

"Sacré!"

"But he will not do it. I, Jules Beaubien, and you, Ba'tiste Le Grand, will stop him."

"Keel?" asked Ba'tiste in his blunt, brusque voice.

Beaubien shook his head quickly.

"Sometime, maybe," he said, "but not now. First Mam'selle Hilda; she must be saved."

"Oui," assented Le Grand. "I onnerstan'."

"To-night you do not shoot until Jules tells you, and only the man Jules tells you to shoot. This is not the time to kill MacDonald, my friend. Sometime—yes. But not now. Understand?"

The grip of Ba'tiste tightened on his rifle. He nodded and said, "I onnerstan'."

"But always, Ba'tiste," cautioned Jules, "you must be near Jules; and always you must come when I call you; and always the canoe must be

ready; and always when I call you, you must not shoot until I say so. Understand, Ba'tiste?"

"Oui."

"That is good, my friend. Sit outside and be ready for Jules. Au revoir."

Baptiste looked, in his simple, almost childish manner, at his companion.

"I'm ready to keel heem jus' soon as I can," he declared. With a final nod he left the room with his silent, sure, woodsman's step.

Jules listened for the footfall of Hilda, but he heard nothing. To stay his impatience, he rolled a cigarette and smoked meditatively.

The talk that he was now to have with Hilda meant very much indeed. What if MacDonald should prevail upon the innocence of the girl as he had upon the cupidity and unsophistication of her father?

What if he had already made her anxious and willing to accompany him, with dazzling

stories of the attractions of the brilliant outside world with which Jules knew full well the other man must have filled her ears?

What if, after all, the magnetic personality and craft of MacDonald had stilled all suspicion in the girl's mind against him, so that it would be useless to warn her of his real designs?

Beaubien was not altogether certain of his ground at this point in his interference with the engineer's machinations.

He knew that his own strong, true love for the girl had made its impression upon her; that she liked him and trusted him, but was by no means sure that she loved him.

And if he attacked MacDonald too openly, if he attempted to tell the girl that the man had a wife and family living and that his promise of marriage could not be anything but a villainous lie, what would he do were she to demand proof of the truth of the attack?

If she got the idea that Jules' own self-interest prompted him to tell unworthily a falsehood against his rival, it might lead the girl to impulsively place her trust in the astute man of the city, and to go away with him.

He must approach the girl delicately. He must leave MacDonald's name entirely out of his talk. He must only seek to awaken in her mind its instinctive suspicion of wickedness—a quality that his certainty of the girl's goodness made him sure was there.

And yet little Annette had been good—but there had been nobody to warn her—to save her—and little Annette was shamed, disgraced and killed.

Hilda, Jules decided, should be saved—even if she herself resisted the efforts for her salvation.

The thought of Annette brought a frown on the forehead of Beaubien that drew a livid line between his brows.

"Soon, M'sieur MacDonald," he mused, "soon we shall see. And little Annette and Hilda, they will also see."

Beaubien heard a step outside. He turned, expecting that it might perhaps be Hilda.

But at the window he saw the smiling countenance of little Ferguson.

"Hello, Jules, how's everything?" asked that cheerful youth.

"Bonjour! Everything is fine."

Ferguson left the window and shortly entered the room.

"Seen MacDonald?"

"Oui."

"Say anything?"

"Much."

"What's the idea?"

"That depends."

Beaubien studied young Ferguson. The thought came into his mind that after all this

seemingly frank and pleasant youth might be none other than a spy in camp.

"You know what I said this morning," declared the lad.

"You said many things this morning, Mr. Ferguson."

"About being declared in."

"I don't know," answered Beaubien, his eyes still studious.

"I mean," said Ferguson, "that if there is a rumpus over this girl, Hilda, I'm *with you.*"

There was that in the young fellow's glance and in the frankness of his speech that caused Beaubien almost a blush of shame that he had for an instant suspected him of treachery.

"That is good, my friend," he said gratefully, "and if I need you I will call."

"All right," answered Ferguson warmly, "I'll expect you to, and—oh, I'm not stuck on this job of mine, anyway. Trying to keep me up

here all winter. And if I get fired for taking sides with you here, I'll at least get back to God's country."

Further speech from him was cut off for the instant by the excited entrance of McTavish.

"Jules, hae ye seen Hilda?" cried the old man. "I hae been huntin' high and low for her, and—"

"Well, if there isn't my old friend, the Scotch thistle," came from Ferguson.

"Gang awa', ye empty-headed fool."

"Wrong again! I may be empty-headed, but I'm not a fool."

"Ye hae nae respect fer yer elders," snorted McTavish.

And instantly thereafter the irritated Scot almost lost his breath in amazement, for Ferguson came forward and said very humbly:

"I beg your pardon, Mr. McTavish."

"Yer what?" gasped the old man.

"I said, I beg your pardon."

" 'Tis time ye were doin' it, ye jackanapes, an' I'm glad ye're gettin' a little sense," was the comment of McTavish, delivered with a growl and a final grunt.

"Ah," exclaimed Ferguson, "how joyful! My apology has been accepted."

McTavish turned impatiently from him.

"Jules," he went on excitedly, "I'm asking ye if ye've seen Hilda?"

"I have had no chance to answer," smiled Beaubien. "No, I have not."

"Well, well," growled the Scot, "I've hunted everywhere for her. I must find her, lad, an' tell her o' Meester MacDonald's plan."

He moved toward the door through which he had entered the room. Just as he reached it Ferguson sang out:

"Oh, Mr. McTavish, just a moment, please."

"What is it, ye young jackanapes?" he demanded, turning.

Ferguson made a quick gesture toward him.

"Pull down your kilts!" he yelled.

McTavish was trapped into an impulsive motion towards his hips. Then, realizing that he was again a victim, all he had for reply was a roar of anger.

"Ba-ah!" he cried at Ferguson.

The door was slammed so hard it shook.

"That fellow's as full of 'ba-ahs' as a mountain goat," observed the grinning Ferguson. "I'm going to write some letters. If you need me, call me."

"Hello," he said, as he saw Hilda hastily enter the rooms. "Oh, you Hilda; your sweet tempered dad is looking for you."

"And I'm looking for him. Hello, Jules, I—"

Young Ferguson left the room with a smile and a nod at them both.

"I'm glad you've come, Hilda. I've been

waiting to see you," said Jules. There was an appreciable note of anxiety in his voice.

The young Canadian drew up a chair for her. She sat down. He stood beside her. He felt that a most important moment in both their lives was at hand.

Jules looked down upon the golden-haired head of Hilda. There was an impulse to touch the shining golden hair, whose thick, yellow strands were severely parted and drawn back from her brow to fall over her shoulders in tightly braided ropes of gold; to touch this hair kindly, tenderly, reverently. But he contented himself with merely looking down upon her head and the graceful turn in the tender cheek that he could see beneath her heavy hair.

The psychological bond was strong between them. She felt his glance and, looking upward, eyed him frankly, saying:

"What is it, Jules? Your voice sounds very

low, very earnest—as if you had something of very great meaning to tell me."

He leaned forward and took her hand. She arose and followed him to the window. The autumn wind, laden with the bouquet of the pines, fanned their faces and stirred locks of her golden hair to rebellion. The clouds had been dispelled, and the moonlight had laid a gorgeous silver crest upon the foliage of the forest, and upon the river stealing silently and swiftly by at the bottom of the slope.

"Hilda," said Jules, finally, "we two are much the same, are we not?"

"I don't know, Jules. Are we?"

And now, unconsciously, his lithe, strong young hand rested on the golden hair above her brow. His brown eyes searched her large, clear blue eyes.

"I mean," he said, his voice very low, "that you and I—we are children of the forest, and it

has been our mother. There is nothing we know beyond it, and nothing we care about beyond it. Is it not so?"

"No, Jules," she replied. "I don't think it is so. I care. Since I was a wee little girl, Jules, I've loved everything—everything in the world, but father; and he would not let me love him. Every dream I have had he has driven away, and now for the last two or three years I have had the strangest feeling coming over me—yearning for somebody or some place—the great desire that things should be different, that my life should be different, that I should be different."

"Hilda," said Jules swiftly, huskily, "you must not call this the great desire. There is only one great desire, Hilda."

"And what is that, Jules?"

"That is love," said the man. He caught her hands. She did not resist. There was that in his touch that won her trust.

"THEN, HILDA, THE WORLD IS FULL OF LOVE."

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She looked up at him earnestly, this girl of the wilderness, in whose knowledge the lack of a mother's care and guidance had left great gaps of ignorance of the world's affairs.

"Tell me all about love," she whispered, aware that she broached some subject that was sacred to him. "Do you know love? Do I love? Whom do I love? How do I love? Jules, why do I love?"

"Hilda, love is the great desire, and all that live have it."

He stared as if in reverie at the moonlit forest spreading its great tangle of beauty, grace and mystery before their eyes.

"In the spring time," he continued, "when the snow melts and the ice crashes down the river; when the pink flowers of the forest peep from under the snowdrifts—then, Hilda, the world is full of love. The ducks and the geese are noisy in their romances. The he-wolf kills

night and day to feed the mother of his cubs. The bull moose bellows in the pride of his fatherhood. The robin watches its bright-eyed mate on the nest, waiting for those three little eggs to bring new life into the world. And all this, Hilda, is the love God wanted man to have. But it is not always so, Hilda. Some men sometimes have sinned, and the great desire is not always good or always pure."

The girl looked keenly at his face and saw the tenderness that softened the well-turned lips of his mouth and the romance that shone in his expressive eyes.

"Have you ever felt the great desire, Jules? Is there love in you that is good, or have you too sinned as other men have, or as my father—" the girl's voice dropped again to a whisper—"as my father says my mother sinned?"

"Hilda," he answered, bending so that his face was very near her own, "I have had the

great desire, like all men, since first the blood beat strong through my heart and I knew that I was no longer a child. I have not always been good. But having been bad I have learned much, and now always I wish to be good. Love, Hilda, comes to a man in his loneliness, and tears at his heart like the fangs of a wolf. I have been to the North, many hundred miles to the North, in the cold of winter, when the gray light of the departing day leaves you in the blackness of night at three o'clock in the afternoon—when at noon, the red rim of a distant sun is the only message from the warmth and glow of the Southland. And then, in the cold and loneliness, the great desire has come upon me. I loved—and somewhere I knew my mate was waiting. And I'd curl up among my dogs and sleep peacefully and dream of my coming happiness."

"I—I, too, have felt that way, Jules," faltered Hilda. "In the long winter months here, I have

watched the wolfpack—gaunt, hungry, hollow-eyed, their white teeth gleaming in the moonlight as they stood near the house and howled for the food to give them life. I have watched my father kill one—only to see the dead wolf torn to pieces by his comrades and then I, too, seem to have felt the great desire—to be willing to change my place, to be one of them, to be free, to suffer, to hunt, to kill—but still to be free to choose my own way of living. Jules—Jules, was that love? Tell me, for I do not know."

"I cannot tell what your love is, Hilda. But," said the young man, with great sudden gravity, as his mind pictured the threatening figure of MacDonald, who would soon have this child-woman practically at the mercy of his conscienceless skill, "love is not always good to listen to. Sometimes love points wrong, and sometimes, when you follow its trail, it leads you to where

there is no food or shelter, and the soul that makes love dies in agony."

"I did not know that," she said, her large eyes fixed in a stare of mystification.

"Hilda," said Jules, "I had a sister just your age."

"I did not know that either," she said, smiling at him.

"Her name was Annette—and she was loved."

"Was it good for her to love, Jules?"

"No—no!" he cried to her, and his voice became broken. "It was not good for her to love, for the mate whom she loved made many promises, and told many lies, and he was not of her race, nor did he speak her tongue. His heart was black with the stain of deceit, but Annette, she was a true mate. Then, Hilda, according to the law of nature, there came a little child, which you do not understand, Hilda, but which must always be so. And this man

of different race and different tongue ran away to his own country and left Annette alone, and that was not good. For the church tells us that there must be a marriage with mates, and between this man and my little sister, Annette, there was no marriage."

Gently the girl removed her hands from Jules' grasp. With her fingers she brushed away her tears gently.

"Poor little Annette," she murmured. "What did she do, Jules?"

"She killed herself, Hilda, that the child might die with her. And that was the trail of love, Hilda, that led to the murder of a soul."

Her hands were crossed on her breast as, with widened eyes, she watched this youthful, strong man, shaken in every fibre by his great emotion. He possessed himself of her hands.

"And if any man comes to you who is not of your race nor of this country, I ask you, my

little girl, to be very careful of God and the church. Promise me—promise me, Hilda!"

"Ah!" she answered him quickly, "that is the way it must be, Jules. Yes—yes, I promise you."

For an instant his lips touched her forehead.

"That is good," he said simply. "I am content."

Hilda started. The rough visage of her father called angrily:

"Girl, where hae ye been?"

The old man hurriedly entered the room.

CHAPTER XII

THROWN TO THE WOLF

Hilda, to whom the minutes that she had just passed with Jules had contained more of tenderness and beauty than her isolated, affection-starved existence had ever known, shrank in dismay at the intrusion of her father, with his rude words spoken in his characteristic harshness of tone.

The poetry, the romance, the purity and the pathos of the things that Beaubien had been uttering to her, the frankness of his mellow voice, the honesty in his fine brown eyes, had entranced the girl.

Wholly unsophisticated as she was, she yet recognized a difference in the touch of his hand and the touch of the hand of MacDonald. She had found herself receiving the touch of Beaubien

and even the light, flitting kiss on her brow wholly without fear or shame.

The purity of it was intuitively recognized. It was not exactlv realized, however, and she wondered why she had welcomed the caress of the one man, and had shrunk from the touch of the other.

She had little time to weigh these matters, however, for her father's raucous voice was repeating the question:

"Girl, where hae ye been?"

His unsympathetic attitude with her, the resentment that never faded out of his queer green eyes, had always the effect of confusing the girl, of making her summon every nerve to face the old man calmly and intelligently.

"Why, father, I—"

Her voice wavered and she drew away from Jules at the window and nearer to the centre of the room. Her father's next words were a relief to her.

"Dinna be makin' excuses," he growled. "I dinna care."

Indeed McTavish was too exhilarated in mind by the plans of MacDonald to have thought of aught else.

"Jules," he asked, "hae ye spoken to her o' Meester MacDonald and his plans?"

Beaubien shrugged his shoulders.

"I have not mentioned his name," he answered.

"An' ye hae told her nothin'—nothin' o' the grand plans o' Meester MacDonald?" demanded the Scot.

"I have told her much," said Jules, in his turn, walking from the window and drawing near the old man, "but I have not mentioned the name of MacDonald. I have not so much as spoken his name."

McTavish stared at the young fellow and shook his head, at a loss to make anything of

his attitude, and then resumed, excitedly:

"Then 'tis fair time she knew."

He opened the door and called MacDonald's name down the hallway. He got no answer. He ran to the window and peered out. He was in time to behold MacDonald just entering the clearing after his walk in the woods.

There was another murky figure, occupying the pine tree seat. It was Baptiste Le Grand, with a rifle on his knees that the darkness made completely hidden.

"Meester MacDonald—Meester MacDonald—is that you, mon?" called the Scot.

"Here, Mr. McTavish. I'll be there in a minute," cried back MacDonald, and, in less than that time looked in at the window. He looked quickly at Hilda, but her eyes were not toward him. They rather sought the eyes of Jules.

A nettled frown appeared on MacDonald's

brow and as rapidly disappeared. He forced himself to smile. After all, he was giving the Frenchman too much thought—too much consideration.

Whatever Jules might have been able to say to the girl, he was to have the final word. He glanced at the slender woman with her face of complete innocence, and by its symbolic purity felt reassured that his subtle wickedness was bound to conquer.

"Coom in, mon; coom in," McTavish called eagerly, "I've a word to say tae ye."

"All right. In I come," responded MacDonald cheerfully from without the window. A few steps brought him into the room. He smiled with his usual fascinating and good-humored expression.

With the Scot the occasion that followed was solemn and momentous. Much as he had hated Hilda for the painful memory which her

golden-haired resemblance to her mother never allowed to die, he yet felt the stirring of a parent's affection when the time arrived when he must announce to her his decision that their lives were henceforth to be lived apart.

"Coom here, girl," he said, and there was in his voice sufficient of latent tenderness to make Hilda move toward him in swift surprise, and even to smile up at him.

"Girl," said the aged man, "ye hae reached the age o' danger tae yersel' an' tae ithers."

The cruelty of this speech drove her back to her old shrinking fear of him.

"I do not know that, father," she said. Her voice was firm. The presence of Jules, she vaguely realized, was helping her.

"But I'm tellin' ye," persisted the old man harshly. "'Twas in the same year o' her life that yer mither blackened her soul. But now I hae found a way to save ye from the sin in yer heart."

Beaubien stood looking on intently. MacDonald was a witness whose face bore an open expression of pleasant approval.

"Meester MacDonald," continued McTavish, turning toward the engineer and waving his long arm, "ye'll be tellin' her o' our decision, an' the plans we hae made. I mysel' hae naething tae say."

MacDonald moved away with smiling courtesy.

"Shall I tell her now?" he asked.

"Aye," assented the old man. "An' Hilda, treat every word Meester MacDonald says tae ye wi' respect an' obedience, for 'tis yer faither's wish an' yer dooty toward yersel, an' ithers."

Remonstrance shot into the eyes of Jules and almost obtained utterance from his lips. The power passed to MacDonald was great. The weapon thrust into the hands of the villainous-minded enemy was so trenchant that it made

him despair of the effect that it would have on Hilda. Surely the child so admonished would yield fully to MacDonald's schemes.

Yet the next instant Beaubien was able to smile as affably as MacDonald, for Jules remembered his own decision, which was that either with her consent or against her will, he would rescue her from the man who would lead her down the same road of shame and death that poor little Annette had trod.

"Coom, Jules, mon," said McTavish, intent that there should be no further delay in acquainting Hilda with the plan on which he had agreed with MacDonald, "coom, and leave them alone."

"That is my pleasure, M'sieur McTavish," said Beaubien, but as he passed Hilda on his way to the door he flashed a great, intent look of warning into her eyes.

She seemed to understand the glance, and yet

hardly to realize its meaning. It was plain that she was confused, trembling, uncertain about the portent of the words that had just passed.

MacDonald, with the girl turned over to him so unreservedly—every barrier of suspicion that might be raised against him in the girl's mind so assuredly broken down by the command of her father that she should render unto him full faith and obedience—was elated. Dangerous as the thing was (which was what made it irresistibly attractive to the adventurous engineer) he slipped between McTavish and Jules on their way out of the room.

"Jules," he said in a voice that was very low, but was teeming with laughter.

"What is it, M'sieur MacDonald?" asked the young man, himself outwardly serene and smiling.

"Where do you stand now, eh?" taunted the strategist.

With the smile never leaving his lips and his

voice sunk quite to a whisper, Beaubien retorted:

"Still I stand on my feet and fight, MacDonald. Au revoir!"

The girl was left alone in the room with the betrayer of Annette. She stared at him wonderingly. The fear of the hunted thing somehow got into her mind and made her body tremble.

It was against her will that these emotions controlled her. The words that Jules had spoken with such splendidly earnest eloquence—the warning that he had uttered against her ever permitting herself to fall a victim to a bad love, as his unfortunate little half-sister had done—struck across her mind unbidden.

For her eyes told her that the man before her was regarding her in a very kindly fashion, and if she did not like the smile on his heavy lips she felt herself that it was only because they seemed

to bespeak amusement at her own apparent trepidation, which, she assured herself, was really an absurdity.

"What is the matter, Hilda? Are you afraid of me?"

The girl felt that she must not at this moment in her life show fear—show any weakness whatsoever.

"No," she replied, surprised at the steadiness of her own voice, "I am not afraid of you."

"Do you like me?" he asked; and his tone was of one that suspected an intended slight.

"Yes," answered the girl generously. "Yes, I like you."

"Then what makes you look troubled?"

She stared at him for several seconds. And he stared at her, frowning slightly, annoyed that he was finding the girl's mind and her disposition toward him very difficult to read.

"Mr. MacDonald," she said slowly, "do you believe in signs?"

"What kind of signs?" he asked indulgently.

"The signs of the forest."

"Superstitions?"

"Perhaps so." Hilda turned her head a little to one side and smiled. "Am I very foolish?"

"Oh, no; maybe not," observed the man, avoiding anything that might lead to controversy. "What sign have you seen?"

"Once, when I was very little," responded Hilda. "I had an Indian nurse—an Ojibway—and she was very wise, for in her tribe she was the daughter of the medicine man. Last night—did you hear the wolves?"

"Why, yes," said MacDonald, finding himself somewhat startled into interest, for his memory of the pack was unpleasantly vivid. "They woke me up."

"They passed the house in a pack last night, and that is a sign."

"A sign of what?"

"They say," answered Hilda, moving toward one of the big chairs and leaning against it, her face showing complete earnestness in her words, "that the wolves never go in packs except when the winter is long and the game is scarce. But in Indian summer they can scent the death of men for many miles, and before death comes they form in a pack and howl at the camp; and then, before the moon rises and sets another time, death will take some man and the pack will come back for a taste of his blood."

"Ugh!" exclaimed MacDonald, with a very genuine shudder.

"Is it a foolish sign? Do you think it is foolish, Mr. MacDonald?"

"Does it frighten you?" asked the engineer, calling back his good-humored smile.

"Something does. Something frightens me as I stand here now. Maybe it was the thought of that—that wild pack scenting the blood of some man who is to die."

MacDonald shook the uncanny subject off with a shrug of his shoulders.

"I'd forget it if I were you," he said. "Besides, I want to talk to you, and not about such foolish things as superstitions, Hilda."

"Ah, yes," exclaimed the girl, looking at him curiously. "What was it father wanted?"

"I've spoken to him."

"About me?"

"Yes."

MacDonald motioned to her to take the chair beside which she had been standing. He walked over and stood near the chair.

"Yes, Hilda; I've been talking to him about you."

"About taking me away to the cities?"

"Yes. I told him what I told you this morning. I said to him frankly that I loved you and that I wanted you. I told him that I would take you to my mother, and that we would marry. And he said, Hilda, that he was willing. Do you love me, Hilda?"

The girl's silence was annoying. MacDonald watched her for a few seconds and then made a gesture of impatience. She looked up at him apologetically.

"I can't tell. I do not think so," she said.

MacDonald laughed. His manner was tolerant, indulgent.

"Do you know any more about love now than you did then — when I spoke to you first?"

Her answer came as a surprise.

"Yes, I do," she said. "I know now that there is a good love and a bad love. Which of these is your love for me?"

MacDonald met the emergency. He leaned over the chair. He placed his face very near to her face. His breath struck against her cheek ardently.

"It is the good love, Hilda," he whispered. "Didn't I tell you that I wanted to marry you? You can come with me now to my country. I will be kind to you—kind as no one has ever been."

Hilda sat very straight in her chair. The fear that she had felt when first left alone in the room with him, and that for a time had lessened, returned strongly. MacDonald's words still came rapidly.

"Afterwards," he said, "when we reach my country, we can be married. I must have you. I've made up my mind to that. I am not of your land or your people, but love does not know these things. I tell you, Hilda, I want to possess you; to have you for my own, away

from every one else; to make you a lady. Do you realize all that I mean to do for you? Your father has said I may have you, and I say I must have you."

Hilda started out of the chair, on her feet. She looked at him with fear frankly in her eyes.

"It is a good love!" cried MacDonald; "a good love, and a big love. Here, Hilda, come to me."

Before she could resist, the muscular MacDonald had seized her in his arms and drawn her toward him, holding her tightly. And with the same swiftness he pressed his lips against her mouth.

There was that in the kiss, in the lewdness of it (of which she was only half-conscious) that made the girl writhe and struggle for release from his arms.

But his grasp was relentless. She continued to battle against him, and suddenly finding that

"THERE WAS THAT IN THE KISS . . . . WHICH MADE THE GIRL STRUGGLE FOR RELEASE FROM HIS ARMS."

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she had wrenched her right arm free, she struck at him.

It was a single, furious blow. It crashed on MacDonald's cheek, and the marks of her slender fingers showed like red welts from a whip-lash on his face.

MacDonald released her—falling back a few paces. His face was agape in astonishment at the power of resistance that had met him.

A great flush of shame reddened the girl's countenance.

"Liar! Liar!" she gasped, her breast heaving. "Your love is a bad love! You say it is a good love? Liar!"

CHAPTER XIII

"YOU CAN'T DO IT"

The blow that the girl struck MacDonald had such a stinging force, had such manifest earnestness behind it, that the big engineer, despite his fatuous illusions concerning his power over her that he had so fully entertained a moment before, now found himself utterly bereft of any such notion.

If the blow were not sufficient to tell him that the girl's instinct—added to the warning that Beaubien, with a sincere lover's skill, had placed in her mind against trusting men of a strange land—spelled defeat to him, her countenance as she flung the word "Liar!" at him in hot denunciation, plainly flared the signals of defeat for his villainous plans, prompted by a no less villainous desire.

Scorn had made the large blue eyes of Hilda glitter as with fire, and her fresh, youthful lips were curled into an expression of loathing.

"Liar!" she called again, to the man who had ended his protest of holding a pure love for her by seeking to implant a kiss as wantonly violent as the expression that had come into his eyes.

"What?" he cried, seeking to cover his bitter amazement with an affectation of indignation.

"Liar!" retorted the girl with an intensity that caused him to retreat a few steps. She threw out her hands. They were clenched.

"It is not a good love," she cried. "It is a bad love! Don't you think I know what my father means? He hates me and you hate me. He says my heart is black. He lies! And you lie!"

The girl took a few steps toward MacDonald. Whatever fear she may have had of him had fled.

"But he wants to make my heart black and you want to make it black; and you and he are trying to make me bad. But you can't do it. You can't do it. *You can't do it!*"

Her voice rose to a scream of anger and defiance at the last words.

MacDonald, striving to regain his self-possession under the lash of her denunciation, protested:

"I tell you, you're wrong. I tell you, my love is good."

"Liar!"

"I want to make you my wife and take you to my country as my wife."

"Liar!"

The recollection of the kiss fell upon her and she wiped her lips with her hand as though she would wipe away a contamination from her mouth.

The gesture angered MacDonald even more than her words, for it drove straight into his

understanding that he was held in abhorrence by this girl. And that was more than MacDonald's vanity could bear.

He strode toward her.

"See here!" he cried, "your father has told me that I could take you away with me, and you might as well understand that I am going to do it."

In MacDonald's mind there was no woman whom sheer force could not tame and bring into amiable subjection.

"Liar!"

The single word the girl was now using in answer to all his protestations had its especial sting.

"If you won't come with me," snarled MacDonald, "then, by God, I'll make you!"

"Liar!"

MacDonald, flushed with anger, ran toward her, his arms extended as if he meant to take her in them and crush all resistance out of her there and then.

The girl sought refuge behind the big solid table in the centre of the room.

"Take care!" she cried at him. "Take care! The wolfpack passed last night! It was a sign! Take care!"

"Hilda, Hilda, I love you!" shouted MacDonald, desperately.

"Liar, liar, *liar!*" cried the girl in retort.

And it was thus, with the word of denunciation on her lips, with her slender body behind the barricade of the table, her yellow hair dishevelled, her face burning with the shame of the kiss that MacDonald had forced upon her, with her mouth expressing scorn and her eyes flashing a great anger, while MacDonald stood at bay, his face gone from red to white, his eyes glittering menacingly, his big body shaken with excitement, that old McTavish, entering the room, found the girl and the man.

He stared at Hilda and then at the engineer.

He screwed his old eyes up to make sure that the impairment of age on his vision was not forcing some queer illusion upon him. He could not recognize in the defiant, proud carriage of Hilda any resemblance whatever to the daughter he had known so long—the child of whom his harshness had made something akin to a cringing animal in his sight.

And in the angry-eyed MacDonald he could not see the genial, pleasant-faced man who had come into his life, promising so much wealth and happiness.

[illegible] XV

[illegible] SHOOT—KILL"

[illegible] the aged McTavish [illegible] MacDonald. Then [illegible] addressed the engineer. [illegible] he demanded. [illegible] the broad-shouldered [illegible]

[illegible] as much amaze- [illegible] deal of both—in his [illegible]

[illegible] Her voice rang. [illegible] to me," went on [illegible] "I told her I'd [illegible] she did—all she [illegible] readily drew his [illegible] horror—"was [illegible]

to throw herself in my arms and beg me
her away from you and the Church!"
There was genuine horror in the face c
when she shouted back at him:
"Liar!"
But McTavish, with his preconceived
in the yellow-haired, innate wickedness
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that had been made against her.
He saw the girl in wilful wickedne
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enamoured only of the stalwart, handso
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His mind so charged, the old man'
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—the madman's look—that came ove

CHAPTER XIV

"WHEN YOU SHOOT—KILL"

Wondering and puzzled, the aged McTavish stood regarding Hilda and MacDonald. Then he found his voice and addressed the engineer.

"MacDonald, mon, what is it?" he demanded.

"She won't go!" cried the broad-shouldered man, ferociously.

"Hilda!" yelled old McTavish, as much amazement as anger—a great deal of both—in his tones.

"No," answered the girl. Her voice rang.

"I told her what you said to me," went on MacDonald, speaking swiftly. "I told her I'd take her to my mother, but all she did—all she did"—MacDonald paused and readily drew his face into an expression of pious horror—"was

to throw herself in my arms and beg me to take her away from you and the Church!"

There was genuine horror in the face of Hilda when she shouted back at him:

"Liar!"

But McTavish, with his preconceived belief in the yellow-haired, innate wickedness of his own child, gave full credence to the charge that had been made against her.

He saw the girl in wilful wickedness ridiculing all his teachings of religion; saw her enamoured only of the stalwart, handsome man with whom he had left her; saw and believed that she had viciously thrown herself, a full-fledged temptress, in MacDonald's path.

His mind so charged, the old man's rage passed from the flush of anger to the dead white of ferocity. MacDonald himself was no little abashed when he saw the fiendish expression —the madman's look—that came over Mc-

Tavish's countenance; when he beheld the bent, gaunt frame straighten, the big hands, distended and trembling, reaching toward the girl; the little green eyes, under the heavy yellow and white brows, gleaming with murderous light.

And MacDonald, who saw that he would have to interfere to prevent the actual killing of the girl, might have found, with all his strength, that he was no match for the gigantic woodsman with the strength and fire of youth that was gone from his body replaced by a madman's strength.

Hilda might have lost her life in that moment had not new factors appeared to block the threatened evil.

It was her own last cry of angry denial of MacDonald's charge that acted as a signal call to Beaubien, who with Baptiste awaited outside the house.

Jules' face appeared at the window of the room, intent and dangerous. He saw only the tableau of the ferocious old man striding toward the girl with hands extended to strangle her.

"Ye wanton! Ye strumpet!" the Scot bellowed at her.

"Liar! Liar!" the girl said. And now there was the high straining of hysteria in the tones of her shaking voice.

"Since the day that yer unholy mither died," shrieked McTavish, beating the table with his fists, "wi' her yellow hair and black soul, an' left me yersel' to care for, I hae feared this time would coom in yer life."

McTavish continued to pound the table with his hairy fist.

"Ye're nae flesh an' blood o' me," he yelled, "and I hae me doubts if I begot ye! Ye're the child o' some o' yer mither's lovers!"

"Liar! I am a true child. I am a true child!"

"Ye're nae a true child. Ye belong tae the deevil an' hell's yer home, an' I swore tae the guid God that whenever ye became the wanton that ye are, I'd kill ye wi' me bare hands; an' I'll do it—I'll do it!" screamed the livid-faced father.

The girl had retreated behind the big table, but he strode after her. For an instant Hilda staggered. Her head was thrown back in weakness, and her throat was bared helplessly to the strangling grasp of the great, gaunt hands that her father would have clasped about her throat.

Jules, pausing for a moment, dismayed by the terrible scene, leaped forward. He caught Hilda's wrist and drew her behind him. Beaubien faced McTavish.

At the interference of Beaubien, MacDonald

"WAIT ONE MOMENT, M'SIEUR McTAVISH."

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half started forward as if to aid McTavish, who stood glowering with wrath to find the young Canadian interposing between himself and his daughter.

"Wait one moment, M'sieur McTavish," said Beaubien, with snapping vigor.

Then with a lift of his head toward the window, the young man called:

"Ba'tiste! Ba'tiste!"

His call had no more than sounded before the sturdy comrade threw open the door and came into the room, his Winchester rifle in his hand.

"Is your rifle loaded?" asked Jules.

"Oui," answered Baptiste.

"Stand at that door," commanded Beaubien, "but don't shoot till I tell you. Understand?"

"Oui," the other answered briefly, and took his assigned post.

"But when you shoot—*kill!*" cried Jules to his aid.

"I onnerstan'," said Baptiste stoically.

Old McTavish found his voice.

"Jules, mon," he cried sternly, "be nae interferin' wi' me family affairs!"

In appeal, however, Jules felt the hands of Hilda tightening on his arm—the trembling, frightened hands of an awestricken child.

"Can't you see," broke in MacDonald fiercely, as he realized that Beaubien was outgeneralling him and that his scheme to possess himself of Hilda was on the very verge of collapse, "can't you see it's the Frenchman who wants her—wants her for himself? It was a Frenchman with your wife, wasn't it? It will be a Frenchman with the girl."

"Are you standin', Jules, between faither and child, and the punishment that's due her?"

stormed old McTavish, further stung by MacDonald's taunt.

"I'm standing, M'sieur McTavish, on my feet to fight—to fight for Hilda—for Hilda and my dead sister!"

He turned suddenly, in response to the touch of the girl's hands on his arm. He passed his arm around her waist and drew her toward him openly.

"There is nothing, Hilda," he said, "to fear."

Young Ferguson, with shirt sleeves rolled up and a pen in his hand, came into the room with a rush. The sound of the high voices had reached him, and warned him that a crisis was at hand.

He took a single glance at the group—McTavish with his big, gaunt hands reached toward Hilda, and Beaubien shielding her, and MacDonald looking at them all with an angry leer.

"What the hell—it's come," said Ferguson. He cast a single glance at MacDonald, and his employer looked at him. But Ferguson turned his glance slowly to Beaubien.

"Jules," he said, "you know what I told you—count me in."

McTavish had held back his boiling anger until he could do so no more.

He leaped forward.

"Gi' me the girl!" he screamed.

"Stop, McTavish!" shouted Beaubien in his face. "Stop, or I speak to Ba'tiste."

McTavish, even in his blind wrath, halted. He looked toward the door. There stood the sturdy companion of Jules. It was too plain that he was holding his rifle in readiness for instant use, and McTavish had sufficient reason left to know that Baptiste would shoot in absolute obedience to Jules; and what was more, he would further implicitly obey the injunction

of Jules that when he did shoot he should "shoot to kill."

The hot blood of Jules destroyed the repression in which he had been trying to hold it—trying to hold it as he had watched MacDonald seeking to encompass the ruin of Hilda—trying to hold it through the exasperation of beholding McTavish's cupidity, leading him as a ready dupe to the engineer's craft, and through all the events that finally brought him to where he had listened, a few minutes before, to the woman he loved, honorably and sacredly, denounced in the repulsive, unjust expletives of "wanton" and "strumpet."

His heart throbbed in the heat of his anger, his eyes glared ominously, and the calm tones in which he had been speaking rose to a ringing cry:

"You call yourself her father," he shouted at McTavish. "You are not as much her father

as the leader of a wolfpack! You've beaten and struck her heart until her soul is nearly dead. But I've listened and I've watched, McTavish."

He wheeled and pointed a quivering finger at MacDonald.

"You think this man was going to take her to his mother and do what he said—give her a good home with a sweet, pure old woman? You think that, don't you? Fool, McTavish—fool! That man has a wife at home. It was Hilda's soul he wanted to steal. That is his business—the business of MacDonald—the stealing of the souls of women!"

"Ye lie, ye French dog!" yelled old McTavish in return. "It was the girl's black heart an' her yellow hair. Gie her tae me! Gie her tae me, damn yer! Gie her tae me while I kill her wi' me bare hands!"

McTavish had advanced so closely that Jules

hurled him back with a powerful throw of his free arm.

"No," he cried to the staggering old man. "She is with me, and so she shall stay. You say you're a God-fearing man, McTavish. Take care! Take care that you do not answer to him for the soul of your child!"

Then Jules turned to MacDonald. His lips were fairly writhing with scorn and anger.

"And you—you dog of dogs," he said. "You wolf-dog! You sneak through the dark—through the dark—and snap at the heels of good women. MacDonald, I stand on my feet and fight—do you hear? I stand on my feet and fight! Annette, that you tracked and killed, you wolf-dog—she was my *sister!*"

Beaubien's voice suddenly became calm. His words were uttered slowly.

"There is no room in the world, MacDonald for you and Jules Beaubien to live in. Either

I die or I'll send you up to Annette to look her once in the face on your trip to hell!"

"A-a-a-ah!" retorted MacDonald, and he spat to show his contempt. "I might have known that you were the brother of that dirty half-breed!"

McTavish strode forward again.

"Gie me me daughter while I kill her wi' me bare hands," he shrieked, and there was the foam of mania on his lips and on his yellowish white beard.

Jules ignored the old man. He still addressed himself to the engineer.

"MacDonald," he went on, "I am going to kill you. First I shall take Hilda away. But I shall come back, and you—you shall die. Do not run away. Do not try to run away, MacDonald, for Ba'tiste—over there—Ba'tiste, he loved Annette. I'll fight you fair. He'll shoot you in the dark. Make your peace with God

if you can, for another day you shall not live."

"Gie me me daughter," gibbered McTavish, "while I kill her wi' me bare hands!"

He plunged forward toward Jules.

Jules had a strong aversion to laying violent hands on old man McTavish. There comes that in the instincts of men that makes sacred the person of a woman they love.

Much as Jules understood that this father's warped mind and queer notions had made his daughter's life a hard and a wretched existence, still he had withheld open physical resistance until it became imperative.

It was no longer possible that he should do so, for the old Scot's mind was so inflamed with the thought that his daughter had really become the wanton that he had always suspected and feared she would become, that the man was at the moment wholly insane, and as he rushed toward Jules and Hilda the gleam in his eyes

was of madness, and the plunge of his big, gaunt body showed absolute recklessness, absolute loss of all control.

Jules suddenly pushed Hilda aside and met the old man. The shock of the collision staggered both. But in such physical encounters youth must ever prevail, and Jules in a few seconds had floored the aged man, huge as he was.

Jules was admirably self-contained in the heat of the struggle. He used only such force and measures as held the father back—back from attacking his child—from killing her, as he had declared he would do, strangling her with his huge, strong hands.

As the young man and the aged man fought across the floor, Hilda stood benumbed in horror and MacDonald and Ferguson watched the struggle excitedly. Only Baptiste was unmoved. He stood at the door where he had been sta-

tioned, rifle in hand. His eyes never left MacDonald.

With a fall that sent one of the big armchairs over so that it crashed on the floor, Jules and old man McTavish went down. The young man was upon the old Scot and his firm, lithe fingers, as they fastened on the white-haired man's throat, killed further resistance. McTavish lay passive. His eyelids fluttered under their thick, heavy eyebrows.

Jules, seeing this, quit the attack instantly. He was about to arise.

Then MacDonald suddenly became a factor in the battle.

The rush of events had confused him. The struggle between Jules and old McTavish had held him spellbound. He had not understood the character of Jules before; he had not before quite realized the nature of the love that Jules bore for Hilda. He had regarded Jules as one

of his own kind—as a hunter for pleasant liaisons, unmoral, flippant of life's most serious meanings.

Now, however, he understood. He understood that Jules loved Hilda as a man loves the woman he will make his wife; that Jules, with his unspoiled youth and romance, was a foe not lightly to be considered. And, moreover, he now knew that Jules had double cause for hatred against him. There was the dead sister, Annette, furnishing a motive for destroying him, that had moved men to kill since the world began.

MacDonald, realizing this plainly and irrevocably, saw here his chance to remove Beaubien—to remove him permanently; to kill him, as he well knew that if he did not Beaubien was bound to figure as his foe in a mortal combat in the near future.

MacDonald had not fear, but he had not a

sense of honor, either. This sense of honor had made Jules declare that when the time came he would kill MacDonald in open fight.

MacDonald decided that Beaubien should never get this chance. He decided to kill Beaubien at this instant. The repulsive aspect of the act he contemplated did not stay him. He decided to stab Jules in the back.

His keen mind saw there would be a ready excuse to be made to the authorities if ever the hand of the law invaded this wilderness. He knew that it seldom did. Surely, what more complete defense could there be, if he declared that he killed Beaubien to prevent the young Frenchman from murdering an old man?

He could take Hilda forcibly to New York; he could silence young Ferguson, and then he could return and calmly face the authorities and tell them a plausible story of the death of Jules—a story that they would promptly be-

lieve, coming from so famous and wealthy a man as MacDonald—coming from a man who could not possibly be guilty of a wrong interest in the girl, since he was married and the father of a family, and therefore of presumable probity in such matters.

This was the manner of MacDonald's reasoning.

Acting upon it, he felt quickly for his sheathed hunting-knife and drew it forth. He held his right hand tensely at his side. The light from the lamps glittered on the keen blade.

Stealthily he advanced toward Jules Beaubien. The back of Beaubien was toward him, and the young Frenchman, having just taken his hands from the throat of McTavish, was slowly, pantingly arising.

CHAPTER XV

THE FLIGHT

And yet MacDonald had reasoned as men may in such moments, utterly without all the actors in the scene. There was Baptiste, who, the instant MacDonald's hand had sought the knife, had levelled the barrel of his Winchester at the engineer's head. And more surprising, there was Ferguson.

Ferguson acted the more swiftly. He leaped forward, faced MacDonald for the fraction of a second and then, with a swing of the arm, landed a heavy blow on the engineer's chin.

MacDonald fell to the floor and banged his head against the big table as he fell. He rolled over, dazed, struggling to regain his feet, and yet too confused to do more than grovel on the floor.

Baptiste lowered the rifle. He was glad of Ferguson's interference. It had relieved him of disobeying Jules' orders and shooting before he was given the word of command.

Jules had arisen in time to see Ferguson knock MacDonald down. The knife that MacDonald held had flown from his grasp as he fell, and Beaubien was enabled by the flying steel to understand the situation.

"Merci!" he called to Ferguson.

Hilda had sunk in the chair. She had covered her face with her hands to shut out the sight of the desperate fight between Jules and her father.

She, too, had looked up in time to see the knife as it flew from MacDonald's hand as he received the strong, swift blow from young Ferguson.

"Hilda—to me!" called Jules. He caught her by the hands and lifted her from the chair.

"Where to, Jules?" asked Ferguson. "You know I said I'd stick to you in this thing to the finish."

"Merci, Ferguson," said Beaubien. "We are going down the slope to the river and then to the canoe."

Hatless, Jules and Ferguson and Hilda, too, they left the room. The faithful Baptiste stood at the doorway, rifle in hand, until they had passed out, and then he followed.

Old McTavish, recovering slowly, got on his feet.

"Gie her tae me—the Wanton—gie her tae me till I kill her!" he screamed hysterically.

The high sound of his voice seemed to bring MacDonald back to his senses. He, too, staggered upon his feet. Outside he could hear the swift footfalls of the little party on their way to the river bank. He cried aloud in his rage and started to follow them out of the room.

"Stop!" said a thick, full voice at the window.

MacDonald, looking in the direction whence the voice had come, saw Baptiste.

"Damn you!" he cried, his face aflame with anger.

Still he moved toward the door.

"Stop!" said Baptiste, very slowly, very calmly, although his eyes showed the deadly thought in his brain. "Stop, or I keel!"

MacDonald found himself in direct line with the levelled barrel of the Winchester.

He fell back. Still dizzy from the effect of Ferguson's blow, MacDonald reeled and clutched the table for support.

Baptiste waited. A low call—a sustained musical cry—came from the bottom of the slope. Baptiste knew that the canoe was launched, with Hilda and Ferguson aboard and Jules at the paddle, and that they awaited him.

He turned suddenly, leaving the window, and disappeared with the silent, swift footfall of an Indian.

Hilda said nothing as she and Jules and Ferguson made swiftly down the narrow pathway to the bottom of the slope and still she stood silent, watching the lithe Beaubien as he launched the canoe.

In the moonlight she saw that the preparations for a journey had been made. Provisions were packed in canvas bags with shoulder straps that they might the more readily be borne through the mountains when the river was abandoned for a forest trail.

Jules had confided to none his exact plans and Hilda hardly knew what to conjecture as to the present journey and where its final destination would take her.

But she did know that her heart told her to trust this man, who had exposed the villainy

of MacDonald and saved her from the unjust punishment that her father would have made her suffer.

She knew the queer old man well enough to understand that but for the presence of Jules and his friends, he would have carried out his threat of strangling her with his own hands to the very death.

Hilda made up her mind that, whatever the fate which had thrown her so completely and dependently in the care of Jules Beaubien, she had really nothing to fear; that in the clean, fair mind of this young son of the forest, there could not possibly lurk any of the thoughts that soiled the brain of the unprincipled MacDonald.

As for Jules, he felt that the girl trusted him. And these were moments for action only. There was not now the time to make full explanation of his plans to her; nor was this

moment the time to be chosen to speak to her of his exalted love and ask her to become his wife.

He felt that there would be something unfair in broaching such a subject at such a moment, even were there leisure to do so.

The girl was absolutely dependent upon him and his protection now. She might consent to marriage with him purely out of gratitude for what he was doing for her.

He had come to believe that she liked him—liked him very much. But whether her sentiments were stronger than that, whether they reached the depths of the great passion that make a man and a woman indispensable to each other's worldly happiness, he did not know. He was not sure.

He hoped and believed that Hilda loved him. The time was coming in a very little while when he would learn if she really loved him.

He would be patient for a little time longer. Men who live in the forests, who hunt in the vast woods and fish by the silent streams, learn as a first lesson of necessity the steady fortitude of patience.

Beaubien wondered if the girl was frightened at the position in which she found herself. He sought to convey reassurance by his every action—in the courtly and respectful touch of his hand upon her arm as he helped her to embark in the canoe, in his quiet smile and his little hurried speech complimenting her upon the steadiness of courage that she was showing after the tragic ordeal endured a few minutes before in her father's house.

With the canoe launched, the little party waited in anxious silence for the coming of Baptiste. They could not be sure what might happen there with two defeated and chagrined men on the one side and the sturdy Baptiste,

so filled with hatred for the man whom he held defenseless under the aim of his rifle.

If MacDonald's rage moved him to attempt the least resistance, Jules understood that Baptiste would only too gladly take the opportunity to revenge himself for the betrayal and robbery of his little sweetheart, Annette.

It was with a premonition that he was soon to hear the report of a rifle shot that Jules waited. It was this that had prompted him to utter the woodland call that had long been a signal of communication between these companions of the forest.

But there was no shot.

Baptiste suddenly and mysteriously appeared among them. So sure was his footing, so practiced and silent his footfall, that none had heard his coming.

He said nothing—this square, squat woodsman, but as softly and silently assumed his

place in the bow of the canoe and took up the paddle.

In the stern sat Jules, paddle also in hand. Simultaneously the blades were dipped in the water and the light, graceful boat shot out into the mountain stream.

The flight was to be long; the toil of it arduous.

The Wind River would have to be followed for miles through the lowlands.

Finally Jules, in his mind, saw the goal of the Massequan reached. This is the point where the silver Wind River flows into the larger stream and its limpid waters are merged and clouded by the yellow, broad Massequan.

To Jules and to Baptiste the topography of the country they were following was an open book. Once entering the Massequan, one encountered many small tributaries that led off into the woodland fastnesses. Jules had in

mind a certain nameless tributary that led to a portage from which point the journey would be taken over the mountains.

This journey could be so arranged as to be wholly concealed from any enemy that might follow, and at night they could again launch their canoe and proceed by the mountain streams until finally they would arrive at the broad highway that led to the Canadian Pacific Railway.

And from this point it was that Jules intended to send Hilda in care of Baptiste and Ferguson, to the great railroad station, and thence with them on to Montreal.

For himself he would not make the journey all the way. There was something else to be attended to before he also left the wilderness and sought the city and sought the realization of his hope—the hope for the happiness of making Hilda his wife.

There was the duel to be fought with MacDonald. He had told MacDonald that he might not live another day; that the world was too small for them both; that Annette was to be avenged, and that the cost of MacDonald's awful treachery to the little sister of him, Jules Beaubien, would be his life.

As soon as Hilda had been escorted to a place of safety, had been carried quite beyond the reach of MacDonald's pursuit, Jules would go back over the trail—go back and find the man.

He would make it a fair fight. He had promised MacDonald so much. He fully meant to keep his word.

It would be a duel as fair as ever men fought, but MacDonald must die.

Jules believed that he would surely triumph over the arch enemy of Hilda and himself. Deeply rooted in his heart was a simple religion and this religion declared to him that pure jus-

tice was on his side; that he was fighting in a righteous cause and therefore it must be the will of fate for MacDonald to be the one to fall.

And what would MacDonald do? Had he completely accepted the defeat of his plan to possess Hilda? Would he instead possess himself of patience and wait at the house of McTavish for the return of Jules, sullen anger surely in his heart, the desire to kill burning in his breast?

Whatever his weakness and his viciousness, the big New York engineer was no coward. Jules remembered that even under the cover of Baptiste's rifle MacDonald had ventured to attack his foe in chief, and that in all probability he himself would be lying prone with a deep knife thrust in his side had it not been that little Ferguson had splendidly kept his promise to aid and had floored MacDonald in the emergency.

As if in communion with the thoughts of Jules, Ferguson spoke. His were the first words that had been uttered by any member of the little group in the canoe. Up to that time there had only been the musical dip of the paddles, and now and then, off in the forest, the wail of wolves.

"MacDonald will not wait for you, Jules. He will come after us."

"Yes—yes," answered Beaubien. "My good friend, we will not speak of that now," added Jules, for he had seen Hilda start at the mention of the engineer's name and the announcement that he would probably pursue them.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PURSUIT

As Baptiste fled from the window and made his way through the woods to the canoe, MacDonald's first instinct was to rush to his room, procure a rifle and start in pursuit.

If he could reach the river bank he might be able to get a shot at them, as they might be revealed by the moonlight.

But a second thought showed him the foolhardiness of this idea. Accurate as he was with a gun, he might have been able to pick off Jules and Baptiste from ambush. But MacDonald realized that, wild as was the country and little as the law interfered between men's quarrels, there did exist a mounted police who made it their strict business to capture mur-

derers, and there was a law that was inexorable in punishing murder with death.

For a high crime like that, the entire force and power of the great Canadian Government would be set to work to track him down. It would not matter that the other men were armed. To shoot and kill from ambush is simple murder.

For men who fought each other openly and fairly the law had a lenient eye. Up in the mountains such duels took place, and, when the fight had been fairly made and a man killed, the law stood with conveniently averted eye and let the victor go his way.

MacDonald, while he would have killed Beaubien without compunction, winced at the thought of dying on the gallows as the price of his enemy's destruction.

Yet Beaubien and Hilda must not get away. He would pursue them. Beaubien had promised

to return and give him open fight: but there was Hilda who, MacDonald now understood only too well, was in love with Jules. What might her pleadings not do? In her fear for the life of the man she loved she might persuade Jules to abandon his scheme of vengeance against the betrayer of his sister.

MacDonald, inwardly, rather understood that Beaubien would certainly return. He did not fatuously underestimate the quality of the determination of the young Canadian.

Assuredly, the first battle in the war between them had ended in a victory for Jules; but for this MacDonald consoled himself with the thought that his foe had the benefit of the aid of Baptiste and Ferguson.

He frowned blackly when he thought of Ferguson. He could not understand or appreciate the innate decency that had led the boy to act as he had done. He only saw rank treachery in

his act. However, he planned no vengeance against Ferguson. He voted him as game too small.

Old McTavish staggered to his feet from the floor where he had been left unconscious by Jules. He was weak and dazed.

"They've gone. They've gone," he muttered, and went with unsteady steps toward the window. "The girl has gone—gone like her evil mither—gone wi' a Frenchman!"

Old McTavish turned to MacDonald.

"What's tae be done, mon? What's tae be done? Meester MacDonald, ye're a smart mon. What's tae be done?"

"Why didn't you do something when you had the chance?" retorted MacDonald. "There was nothing that I could do. But as the girl's father, if you had had enough sense to get your shotgun and kill that animal, Baptiste, I would have finished the other fellow."

"Ye talk foolishness," said McTavish, resentfully. "Yer brain is overwrought."

He looked thoughtfully at MacDonald.

"I've a mind," said the old man after a little while, "that it may not be so bad, after all—that Jules may mean well by the girl. And you, Meester MacDonald, what was it Jules said aboot ye havin' a wife yersel', and it bein' a lie aboot yer intendin' to take Hilda to your guid mither in New York?"

"Do you believe a dog of a Frenchman against a Scotchman?" demanded the engineer.

In the logic of old McTavish, this protest of MacDonald was unanswerable.

"I mean ye nae wrong," he said. "But what shall we do, mon? There was a day when I would hae gone out and hunted down the strumpet, and never rested till I saw her deed wi' her yellow hair above her white face. But

I misdoubt that I could do it now. I'm far too old."

"You stay here," said MacDonald suddenly. "You stay here. I'll find them. I'll have the lives of those two French dogs, and I'll bring the girl back to you. Get out the canoe from the shed. The trail may be long. Put some food in the boat. I'll go to my room and get my Winchester, and this very night I'll start in pursuit of them; and when I find that dog Jules, he'll die."

" 'Tis not the boy. 'Tis her, wi' the black heart o' her mither. Kill her, Meester MacDonald; kill her and keep her oot o' the paths o' men tae lead them tae their ruin."

"The old fool," snarled MacDonald, as he raced to his apartment, drew his rifle from its pegs on the log wall, examined the weapon and laid it on a table. He drew on his leather hunting-coat, adjusted his cartridge belt, and

then, catching up his slouch hat and the rifle, went out to the shed.

The old man was busy storing the little boat with provisions. He brought down his finest pair of paddles, and then, carrying one end of the canoe while MacDonald carried the other, they wended their way to the river bank.

There was no word of parting. Old McTavish silently saw the engineer depart on his errand of death.

MacDonald was an expert with the paddle. The light craft shot rapidly ahead.

McTavish stood on the bank and watched it for a long time. One might see it for some distance, for beyond the landing the ground lay flat—a level of brush, with only here and there a hemlock tree rustling in the night wind.

Far ahead there was a tiny object on the water. This, perhaps, was the canoe bearing the fugitives. The little object slipped around

a bend in the river, and as MacDonald saw it go he plied the paddle with added strength of rage.

He recognized that the pursuit must be careful. He must trap Jules alone. He knew that if he opened fire on the boat he not only risked the killing of Hilda, but he would draw the fire of three against the fire of one. He must proceed cautiously in his desire to come face to face with Jules and settle their deadly quarrel.

He planned his best manner of pursuit, as he sent the boat shooting swiftly forward with powerful strokes.

With Jules and Baptiste at the paddles, as against MacDonald alone working in his canoe, it would have been strange if the engineer had ever brought them within sight in the night's row down the Wind River by the mouth of the Massequan.

THEY WERE EVER ALERT WITH THEIR RIFLES AT THE SLIGHTEST SOUND.

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By following a tributary—the Little Bear River—Jules and his party arrived at a portage at sunset the next day. The men had builded Hilda a little house of boughs the night before for her retirement, sleeping, themselves, in the open. And they were ever on the alert with their rifles at the slightest sound.

Their arrival at the portage of the Little Bear River was a huge relief to Jules. It meant that Hilda was absolutely safe. MacDonald had been so far outdistanced that nothing could now prevent Baptiste and Ferguson from escorting her to the railway and then to Montreal. As for Jules—he had another thing to do.

The camp that was pitched for an hour's rest was at the bottom of a winding trail. Great pines and hemlocks sheltered the little spot, and the Little Bear flowed rippingly along a sandy shore.

The canoe that had done such good service

was beached nearby. Baptiste had readily kindled the camp fire, and Hilda, indignant at being told that she must seek rest immediately, had herself prepared the supper, boiled the coffee, fried the bacon and even made a short-bread that was most palatable.

The meal finished, the little party sat silently for a while, their eyes contemplating the glorious autumn coloring of the foliage.

Jules arose and walked over to where young Ferguson sat, hunched in the attitude of a man wholly spent. The young fellow looked up with a start.

"Time to be on our way?" he asked, with something of protest in the query.

"Not yet," smiled Jules.

"Oh, don't stop on my account," sighed Ferguson.

"What's the matter, my friend Ferguson?" asked Jules.

"Oh, nothing," replied the youth staring in front of him.

"Still you seem depressed."

"Aren't you?"

"No."

"Well," said young Ferguson, "I've just been thinking of the pleasant little trip we've got to take to Montreal, and of the hill we just had to climb to reach this bank of the river."

"And that depressed you?"

"Carry that canoe on your shoulder and you will be depressed—anyway half an inch, what?"

Jules patted him kindly on the shoulder.

"Brace up," said he. "The worst is over for you."

"For me? What about you?"

"There is only one thing for me to do."

Ferguson stared closely at him.

"You are going back?"

"Yes."

"After MacDonald?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because, M'sieur Ferguson, that is exactly what I told him I would do."

Ferguson shook his head ponderingly.

"But you are all right, now you've got Hilda. What are you doing? Are you simply looking for trouble?"

"I told him that I would, and, of course, I will do it."

Jules spoke with no bravado. His tone was in the casual character of a man who spoke perhaps of a business obligation. "It is a plain duty to me as a brother—even if I had no other reason?"

"What other reason?"

"Hilda."

"But he did Hilda no harm."

"He tried."

"Yes; and you stopped him."

"Still, don't you think that's enough reason for me to act?"

"I don't know much about this here business," said Ferguson with a flash of his old fun.

"Why?"

"Well," said he dolefully, "look at me."

"What about you?"

"Well, carried away by the sweep of sentimentality, or a glance at a pretty girl's face who is in trouble, and I manage to have promptly made a monkey of myself."

"I don't quite get you," persisted Beaubien.

"Well, here I am—"

"Yes," assented Jules, laughing, "here you are. I see that, M'sieur Ferguson."

"I have no job."

"That is true."

"I haven't any money."

"Why, that is easily fixed."

"And I haven't even got a hat. Forgot it in the excitement."

"Well?" smiled Jules.

"Well, now, if I had just landed you on the jaw instead of MacDonald, I would have had a raise in pay and a chance to go home, and everything would have been all right; but—but, you see, my magnanimity—"

"Your what?"

"My intuitive desire to fuss with other people's business and butt in at the wrong psychological moment has made me one indubitable dub—I am broke, a long ways from home, and God knows what the finish will be. But"—young Ferguson turned his frank face to Jules and grinned his funniest mischievous grin—"but don't you mind this wall I'm putting up, Jules, old boy; for I'm game, and down in my heart I don't regret it one bit. But you?"

"I," repeated Jules, "must go back."

"Have you told her?" asked Ferguson with a nod of his head toward Hilda.

In spite of himself, Jules started slightly when young Ferguson asked him if he had taken Hilda fully into his confidence, as to his purpose of returning and fighting a duel to the death with MacDonald.

Both men turned to look at the girl. She was half reclining on a nest of boughs that the men had prepared for her under an overhanging rock.

She was staring into the forest, with her large blue eyes very wide, a hand supporting her chin, her little moccasined feet tucked under her rough blue serge skirt.

"Why," said Jules, finally, "she must know that I intend to go back, for she heard me tell MacDonald that I would."

"Yes, I know she did," answered Ferguson,

"but I don't believe she thinks you are going to do that!"

Jules looked again at Hilda.

"When are you going, now?" asked Ferguson, in a voice that had gone down to a whisper.

"No, but very soon. I will leave Hilda with you and Ba'tiste. You'll begin that long trip to the southward to-night. I will go back. I will keep my word."

As if Hilda had divined the purport of the talk of the two men, she suddenly arose and sauntered toward them. She smiled as she came forward, and it was evident that she had not guessed the subject of their conversation.

"Mr. Ferguson," she said.

"Yes, Hilda," answered the boy, rising in haste and making her a little bow.

"I am sorry."

"What are you sorry about?" he asked.

"About you."

"What is there to be particularly sorry for about me—outside of my looks?" he concluded apologetically.

The girl came nearer and frankly placed her hand on his shoulder.

"What you did for me," she said. "You've made Mr. MacDonald an enemy, and that is very bad, isn't it?"

"What made you think that?" demanded Ferguson.

"I mean for you—the position."

Ferguson laughed at her.

"Well, Hilda, I guess I never was much of a fellow to take up diplomacy as an occupation. I find that my argumentative faculties are limited to such an extent that in order to accentuate any particular point of a debate the logic of my brain quickly descends along my arm, rushes into my fist and I throw it at the opposition. When I was in school I started an

argument by saying 'It is not so,' progressed a minute until I called the other fellow a liar, and then ended in a fight. So what I did to MacDonald is second nature to me. And anyway, I'm glad of it for your sake and for Jules."

Jules had also arisen.

"Hilda," he said, "my good friend, M'sieur Ferguson, does not have to worry about positions or means to get home. I can attend to that."

"That is very good," said Hilda. Then she glanced toward Jules and asked:

"Where do we go now?"

As she spoke she swayed and fell back. Young Ferguson caught her. The girl's face had gone pale. Her lips were trembling, her eyes wavering.

"Hilda," said the youth with concern, "you are all in."

"You are very tired. Is it not so?" asked Jules anxiously.

But the weakness had passed. The girl stood again on her own footing.

"I don't know why I should be," she said stoutly. "It hasn't been such a long walk—not so much walking. Why, it has really been nothing. Many times I have done twice as much. But," and again she trembled and swayed, "I do feel weak, terribly weak."

"Well, you've been through a whole lot," Ferguson said to her. "I think the best thing you can do is to go right back there and stretch out for a few minutes." He indicated the bed of boughs under the rock. "Besides, Hilda," we three fellows have a lot to talk about, and it is only right that you should rest. This is a serious situation. Eh, Jules?"

"Oh, not so very serious. But I think, too, that Hilda should rest. Oh, Ba'tiste!"

"Oui," said the faithful companion of the man-hunt that was now drawing to its close.

"Ba'tiste, you will bring some blankets from the canoe and place them under that rock for Mam'selle Hilda."

"Oui."

Ferguson and Jules took Hilda by the arms and as Baptiste laid the blankets they led her toward the couch.

Hilda withdrew her arms from their hands.

"Oh, please don't," she smiled. "I can go. Please don't. It's no trouble for me. I'm not as bad as that."

They permitted her to walk to the couch by herself. When she assured them that she was feeling comfortable, and already began to feel new strength, they walked away from her, Ferguson saying:

"Now you just pound your ear there for

about fifteen minutes and it will do you a lot of good."

"Even if you do not sleep," added Jules, "close your ears and your eyes, and I think you will be rested."

As they turned away Ferguson's eye rested on Baptiste as he knelt over the canoe arranging some of the supplies. Ferguson's boyish grin began working his mouth again.

"What an intelligent fellow he is," he said to Jules. "Some time when I have nothing else to do I'm going to teach him to lie down, roll over and eat out of my hand. I think, Jules, there'd be money in showing a trained bunch of French-Canucks like him."

"Ah, M'sieur Ferguson," interposed Jules, "you must not make fun of Ba'tiste as you have done of McTavish. Ba'tiste, it is true, he has but little brains, but he has one great big heart, M'sieur Ferguson."

"Oh, he's all right, but—"

"But what?"

"He never put those clothes on."

"Why not?"

"They must have dropped on him."

Jules smiled involuntarily at this description of the stocky, clumsily attired Baptiste. He called to his faithful comrade.

"Never mind about Ba'tiste's clothes," said Jules, as his friend drew near, "we have now some plans to discuss. Come here, Ba'tiste, and you, my friend Ferguson," said Jules, taking a seat on the moss-covered ground at some distance from Hilda. The other men followed suit.

"Listen to Jules Beaubien and his business: and what he is to do and what you are to do," he said. "There is serious business to discuss."

CHAPTER XVII

THE LAW OF THE WILDERNESS

"There is serious business ahead," Jules said, impressively to Ferguson and Baptiste.

"Well, if you should ask me," observed Ferguson quickly, "there is a damn sight more serious business behind us—MacDonald. But go ahead."

"This is where we part," said Jules.

"Jules Beaubien," said Baptiste, stolidly, looking at Ferguson, "he go back to keel."

"Yes, that is so," assented Jules quietly.

"I go—lak you," growled Baptiste.

"No," said his comrade.

"Yes," said Baptiste, venturing for the first time in all their companionship to question the decision of Beaubien. "I go along. Eet is my business; an' MacDonald—he wait."

"Hold on," spoke up Ferguson, "if both you fellows look for trouble with MacDonald you can count me out. I'm going the other way—quick. I know MacDonald; and if either of you has got him doped for a coward—well, get wise. He is low down when it comes to women, but there ain't a streak of yellow in his system when it comes to the fight question."

Jules, with his eyes on young Ferguson, shook his head slowly.

"M'sieur Ferguson, listen! It is good that Mr. MacDonald is not afraid of me. It is good that I am not afraid of Mr. MacDonald. The time has come when one of us must die. I have spoken these words and I mean them."

"I've no doubt you do, Jules. But what's the idea?"

"This, then, is the idea—the thing of which I would speak to you," said Jules, as he drew

a paper from his pocket. Yesterday morning, when I found that MacDonald was the man who killed—who killed my little sister, Annette—and when I found out that Hilda, too, was in danger, I knew this fight was coming; was—what you say?—bound to come. And I could not tell how soon or in what way. So here on this paper I have written these words. Read them, M'sieur Ferguson."

The young man took the paper, but he found it very difficult to decipher the words on it, for the twilight had begun to fall, and it fell very rapidly.

The sun was entirely gone. The gray light was so dimmed by the shadows of the big trees around them that the paper was in Ferguson's eyes a mere blur.

"Can't see," said Ferguson finally. "Somebody stake me to a match."

Jules produced the light and held its small

flame over the paper. It did not take Ferguson long to read what was written there. It was a matter of only about fifty words.

While Ferguson read and Jules held the match, Baptiste sat sturdily and steadily puffing at his pipe. For all his dullness, he could understand very well what the paper must be.

"I see," commented Ferguson, putting the paper down while Jules blew out the little flame, "your will."

"Yes."

"Nice pleasant little document to hand a fellow," observed the boy, with just the slightest sign of a shudder.

"Who knows?" answered Beaubien, practically. "It may be necessary. Have you read it through?"

"No; but I guess it's all right. What is it?"

"This is my plan, my friend; I leave you both here with Hilda. You will go down

the river to its fork. You know where I mean?"

"Exactly."

"You will wait there until to-morrow at noon. If I do not come"—he addressed Baptiste—"Listen, this is for you."

"I leesen."

"At noon, if Jules Beaubien does not join you, you will come back to find Jules; and if you find Jules—if you find Jules dead, then, Ba'tiste Le Grand, it is for you to kill MacDonald."

"Oui. I t'ink I want to keel heem."

Ferguson was startled: these men talked so calmly of killing another human being. He did not fully understand the unwritten law of the wild places that makes such deeds, under certain circumstances, wholly up to a native standard of justice. He was revolted.

"Well, right here," he broke in, "I want to

say that I don't want to be a party to this killing business. However, it's your affair, not mine. In my country a punch in the nose generally clears up these things, but you fellows have got a dope altogether different. But you know yourselves better than I know you." The boy paused, and refilled his pipe with fingers that shook slightly. "Only," he added, "I hate to see this come to MacDonald."

"It is my business," said Jules.

"Well, I knew he'd get it sooner or later; but it's going to be tough—damn tough. And, besides, Jules, what are you going to do about the law?"

"This law," said Jules calmly, "is the law of the wilderness. It has always been this way. And now again it will be this way."

"How about the Northwest Mounted Police? Can you get away from them?"

"This is a duty," said Beaubien decisively. "I

have promised. I do not fear the consequences."

"But, see here, Jules. Do you think MacDonald is worth the trouble of going to jail for? And, then, don't you forget something? There's Hilda."

The men arose, Jules leading the movement.

"M'sieur Ferguson," said he, "there will be no mounted police and there will be no jail. All that Hilda has to fear is that maybe sometime I will not come to her, and that is my affair. And whether MacDonald goes home or I come to Hilda, must rest with me; but there can be no change of plan."

"Oh, all right," answered Ferguson. "That's just one more reason why I'd like to get away from this country and back to the United States."

Baptiste joined in the talk.

"If you no come at noon, Jules Beaubien, what den?" he inquired.

"You will do what I told you to do, mon ami. And you, M'sieur Ferguson—you will take Hilda finally to Montreal. You will go to the bank in Montreal with this paper, and there you will give Hilda all that I have, and you will see that she is well taken care of all her life by someone. Will you not do this for Jules Beaubien if he is killed, my friend?"

"Sure, I'll do that all right," answered the youth quickly.

"And you will take what money you need to go where you will; and you will always have the gratitude of Jules Beaubien. And you will remember me kindly, and always you will take care of Hilda."

Promptly young Ferguson took Beaubien's hand.

"I don't know," he said, with his lad's smile, "how I'll stack up as a guardian, but I'll do

the best I can. But, on the level, I don't like this business at all."

"Still, it is my business," said Jules.

"You love Hilda? Eh, Jules?"

"Yes; that is true."

"Does she love you?"

"I do not know."

"Well, if you ask me I think she ought to, after what you've gone through for her, and I'll do my part, although I don't like it—this killing business. And I don't think it is necessary."

"Well, M'sieur Ferguson, my friend—that is the way it must be."

"I just want to tell you besides, Jules—I just want to say—well, you are going back to MacDonald?"

"Yes."

"Don't be too sure that he won't come for you. I've known him a good many years, and

while in this particular instance I think he is all bad all the way through, you've got to give him credit for not being a coward. You understand, Jules, this is just a tip. Keep your eyes peeled for MacDonald. He knows what's coming to him, and he's an American. We have a national characteristic of beating the other fellow at his own game. That's what made us a big people, with a big country. Just keep your eyes peeled."

"Merci! I shall always be ready, Ferguson, my friend."

Ferguson knocked the ashes out of his pipe, rammed it in his hip pocket and faced toward the canoe.

"Well, I guess we all understand what the programme is, and the sooner I get on my way the better I'll feel. I'm mixed up in this argument, but I don't want any stray shots or other little delicate missiles coming my way. The

farther I get away from the rumpus the more comfortable I'll feel. Let's go."

"I want to speak to Hilda first," said Jules.

"I'm on. Alone, I suppose?"

"Yes. Alone."

"Hey, you, Ba'tiste! Let's beat it. But, no—you stay here, case of accidents, while Jules is talking—such an accident as somebody appearing suddenly, like I'm thinking every minute MacDonald may do. You stay, Ba'tiste," added Ferguson. "Nobody minds you. I even think I could make love with you around just as easy as if you were the family dog. I'll go and wait in the canoe."

CHAPTER XVIII

"I LOVE YOU"

With the thought in his mind that he might be looking upon her face for the last time on earth, Jules walked slowly to the improvised cot beside the rock where Hilda was lying with her eyes closed, and the beautiful yellow hair that had caused her so much misery from her father's sharp tongue somewhat in disarray upon her sun-browned forehead. Ferguson and Baptiste had disappeared.

"You are not asleep, Hilda," said Jules softly, standing above the bed of boughs.

She opened her eyes slowly.

"No, I am not asleep," she said.

"But you feel better?"

"Oh, much better, Jules. I am quite strong again. I do not know what was the matter,

except that, Jules, last night and to-day have been a terrible night and day—have they not?"

"They have been wonderful—this night and this day."

"Help me up, please," said Hilda, and he caught her arm and drew her to a sitting position.

"Jules," she continued, "where are we going from here?"

"You are going to Montreal."

"That is a long way," said the girl, a little doubtfully.

"It is a long trail," he assented.

"When will we get there, Jules?"

"*You* will not be long. Soon you will be at a railroad. You have never seen a railroad. It is quite wonderful. You—you will ride on the railroad to Montreal?"

"And you, Jules?" she asked suddenly; "where will you be?"

"Maybe I will be with you, Hilda."

"*Maybe* you will be with me? Somehow," she brushed back her golden hair, "somehow, I thought you would always be with me."

"That is my wish, Hilda—that I should always be with you. But, you see, no one knows now."

"How soon will you know? And what will you stay here for, Jules?"

"Soon I will know," he answered. He paused. "And I cannot tell you why I stay here."

The girl spoke with sudden resolution:

"I cannot go without you, Jules. I shall stay here, too."

"No, Hilda," he said, hastily. "It is not good for you to stay. It is only good for Jules to stay."

His voice had the soft patience of one who talks to a loved child.

"Why do you stay?" she asked. "Please tell me."

"I cannot tell you, but I must stay."

Hilda leaned forward and looked up squarely into his face.

"I know why you stay. And I, too, shall stay," she declared.

"Why do you want to stay?" he demanded.

"It is what you said this afternoon," she said.

"I don't understand."

She arose and stepped up to him.

"The great desire, Jules; it is upon me," she said frankly, "and I know now what it means. I knew the moment you took me in your arms when my father came for me, I knew what this feeling meant—this thing that has had hold of me for two years—ever since we met."

She drew back. Her voice lowered.

"But I do not know," she stammered, "I do

not know that it is good for me to tell you."

"I am your friend, Hilda, and have always been. I think it would be good for you to tell me anything now, for all that you say means much to me. How do you feel?"

"I have learned one thing—one beautiful thing to-day," she replied.

"Yes? And what may it be, Hilda?"

"Jules, I have learned that I love you. Is it bad for me to say that I love you?"

"No. And I love you. And I always have loved you. From the first day I came to your house I saw you as you were. I did not always know that I loved you, and I went away thinking that it was pity for you; but when I went to the North and lived all winter in the ice and the snow, with no one but my dogs and Ba'tiste, then I knew that it was you. And always, every year since then, I have been waiting the time when I could tell you, and you would

"THE GREAT DESIRE HAS BEEN MINE, AND IT IS YOURS, AND IT WILL BE OURS FOR EVER, HILDA."

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understand. Do you understand now?"

"Yes, Jules, I understand, and I know, and I feel, and I am happy!"

Her voice came with splendid vehemence.

"And, Jules, I never want you to go away from me. You—you are all I've ever loved. Why, Jules, you have taught me what love means."

Jules drew her head to his breast and whispered:

"And I have always thought, too, that I should come and get you, and every year I knew it was my duty to come and care for you, and every year I knew that if it was not then, then it would be another year that I should take you away, because I seemed to feel that that was the way God meant it to be, and I loved you. The great desire has been mine, and it is yours, and it will be ours forever, Hilda. That is good for me and it is good for you, and I

think it is just as it should be, and there will never be any hardships, and there will never be any more insults or complaints, but if I live—"

"If you live?" she cried, clutching at the arm he had passed around her shoulder. "Why should you not live?"

"You, Hilda," he said, with an effort, "you must go with M'sieur Ferguson and Ba'tiste, and I stay."

"You mean that—"

"Yes."

"No, no; you cannot stay here," she said. "You have no right to leave me now. That—ah, that was only a foolish thing you said about going back. I cannot let you go. If you do go back I am going with you. I'm not going to let you do all that—not for me. It isn't right. Besides, he did nothing. You stopped him. Why do you have to go?"

"Hilda," said Jules, gravely. "Once I had a sister."

"Annette?"

"Annette."

"And that is why you are going to go back to him?"

"That is why, but not for Annette or for you, alone, but for other Annettes and other Hildas he has not seen and has not met, but if he lives he will see and will meet. And with him, Hilda, that is not good."

"It is a terrible thing to kill a man, Jules," she said, gazing into the forest.

"It is worse, Hilda," answered Jules, "to do what he does."

"Yes; it is worse," she agreed. "But, Jules, it is right that I should go, too. It is right that if you die, I shall die. I cannot have it any other way. I'll be frightened without you. Where would I go? Who would help me?"

Beaubien drew her very close to him.

"You will go with Ba'tiste and Ferguson," he said gently, "and soon I think I will join you. Something tells me, Hilda, that I shall not come to harm. Something tells me that we will be together. I cannot think that all this has gone on so long to stop now. But I said to MacDonald that I would come back, and the word of Jules Beaubien cannot be broken—cannot be broken."

In this moment Beaubien felt a sudden harrowing grief take possession of him. He gently put the girl away from him and walked off a few paces. But the girl followed him, putting a hand on his shoulder, looking eagerly into his face. He made a great effort to control himself.

Young Ferguson, returning from his stroll, saw them. He could understand the pain that it was their lot in this moment to endure. The

boy turned his back as one unwilling to look on such privacy.

"I cannot go," Hilda said. "I must always stay with you. Let them go."

She motioned to Ferguson, and to Baptiste, who was standing by the river bank, looking up the stream—a figure as motionless as if he were made of bronze.

"Hilda, you must go," said Jules. "It is hard for me to let you go now, but it must be that way."

"No, Jules—no—no," the calmness was leaving her voice. It was quavering.

"I love you, Hilda, I love you!" cried Jules, and caught her in his arms and kissed her mouth. "And, Hilda, I will see you again. But you must go, and I must stay, for it is my word and I have promised."

"No, Jules—no—no," she answered.

"To-morrow, at noon, Hilda, ma cherie, I

will meet you at the fork of the Little Bear River with Ba'tiste and M'sieur Ferguson, and *there* will be a priest, and *there* you will be my wife. Wait till noon, and if to-morrow at noon, at the fork of the Little Bear River, I, Jules Beaubien, do not meet you—remember I am waiting for you on another river that has no ending, where there is but one Father, who is a kind Father, and where there are no MacDonalds, and where there is no complaint, and where there are thousands and thousands of canoes and all of them filled with angels and floating in the sunshine forever on the peaceful waters of this river Always will I wait there, and whenever you come I will be there to take you in my arms. Au revoir—au revoir, Hilda. I love you. I love you."

And this time, as he would have caught the girl up in his arms, her own arms were out toward them, and they embraced, and in this

embrace they were motionless for many seconds. Then Jules would have disengaged himself, but Hilda held him tenaciously.

"No, Jules—no—no—no, Jules!" she sobbed.

He averted his eyes from her pleading face.

"Ba'tiste!" he called. "It is time."

The bronze image by the river bank moved. He came slowly, with troubled eyes, looking on the girl and his comrade.

"Come, Mam'selle," he said, with all the gentleness that he could put into his gruff voice. "Come, Mam'selle; come."

He took her by the arm and drew her in the direction of the canoe. Her emotion had reached an agony.

"Jules—Jules," she repeatedly sobbed.

And Jules did not dare look toward her. He stood with his back turned to the canoe, his hands covering his eyes.

Ferguson looked at him and started forward

to say a word of farewell, but the sight of the man's great grief caused the lad to turn and join Baptiste and Hilda without having spoken a word to Jules.

With Hilda aboard, Baptiste motioned to Ferguson to embark, and then himself pushed the canoe out into the stream, and with quick strokes of the paddles the little boat shot away.

"Jules, my love—my love," sobbed the child, who had grown into womanhood with the finding of the great desire.

The rippling sound of the paddle grew fainter, and Jules, looking up into the darkening sky, spoke. It was a prayer.

"Oh, good God, please let Jules Beaubien meet Hilda at noon," he said.

For some minutes Jules remained in his attitude of prayer. All the while, faintly and more faintly, there came to his ears the dip of Baptiste's paddle that bore Hilda away in the

canoe. And then no longer could he hear the dip of the paddle.

The moonlight that had flooded the camp darkened. Rift on rift of clouds piled in the sky and flooded across the silver orb. Out of the forest and along the river the winds grew chill—a little foretaste of the blizzards that the winter months would bring.

It was not so much the winds that made Jules shudder as the thought of the frightful task that he had ahead. MacDonald must die. Jules never doubted the righteousness of the purpose he had conceived of slaying MacDonald.

As he had told Hilda, it was not only for the sake of the betrayed Annette, who had died in the torture of freezing and whose tender body was rent asunder by the jaws of hungry wolves; it was not only that MacDonald should be punished for seeking to repeat with Hilda his crime against Annette! but for the sake of unknown

Annettes and Hildas, Jules asserted to his mind and conscience that MacDonald deserved death.

He next pondered on MacDonald's present whereabouts. Had he calmly remained behind, content to have for a battleground the very clearing in front of old McTavish's house, where he had made false love to Hilda?

Or had he started in pursuit? If he had Jules did not believe that there was much chance of their meeting on this night. The little tributary of the Massequan that he had taken in order to reach this present retreat had been used principally for the purpose of baffling MacDonald, who followed. Yet he knew that MacDonald was a shrewd man, who might have reasoned that Jules had made such a move.

But there had been two men at the paddles against MacDonald alone, and Jules concluded that if he started late at night and made his

way back to the Massequan he would be in line to encounter MacDonald and take the life and death issue with him at dawn of the next day.

Jules, therefore, decided on a few hours' repose before starting on the return trip. Bodily he was weary. The flight had been a hard one. There had been a constant use of the paddles; there had been the rough trip over the country.

He busied himself gathering dry wood, and a bright fire crackled. He thought to make himself some coffee, and taking up a pannikin, moved toward the brook that babbled amiably and softly behind the big rock under which Hilda had for a time made her bed.

The clouds gathered even more thickly. There was only the light of the fire to guide the steps of Jules.

Dipping the pannikin into the brook, he returned with it dripping. For the moment he

was off guard. He had decided that MacDonald could not possibly have caught the right trail.

But Jules was wrong. MacDonald's shrewdness had kept him in much closer pursuit than even an experienced woodsman like Jules had thought probable or even possible. And luck had played in MacDonald's favor.

He had decided that Jules, Hilda, Ferguson and Baptiste, in the little canoe, would seek to turn off from the broad Massequan, whose straight course and flat banks would have made them visible to their pursuer for miles. He had reasoned that they would turn up one of the tributaries and then go overland to some portage that would bring them to the Little Bear River, and make the journey to the Canadian Pacific Railroad comparatively simple and easy.

His luck had been that he had chosen the right tributary!

CHAPTER XIX

THE DEATH DUEL

And now, as Jules moved unsuspectingly from the brook with his pannikin of water, a little free play of the moonlight showed a man at the top of the ascending pathway overlooking his camp.

The man was moving stealthily, but as the moonbeams played upon him he was startled into a sudden backward motion in his effort to secure concealment behind a tree. And in this sudden movement a dry twig crackled under his foot.

In the tense stillness of the forest the crackling of the twig sounded sharply. Jules heard it. His woodsman's instinct was swiftly aroused.

Jules paused. He looked at the pan of water

in his hand, and, as if he had not secured as much water as he desired, he calmly returned to the brook and refilled the pan.

But all the time he was listening—listening intently.

The man above moved forward again. He was in the act of bringing his Winchester to his shoulder, when again the crackling of a twig under his foot caused him to dodge behind a tree.

"MacDonald," whispered Jules.

Dismay came upon him for an instant.

Here was his deadly enemy behind the trees —his deadly enemy, who had sneaked upon him, and who did not mean to make it a fair fight, but evidently meant to shoot Jules down from ambush.

And Beaubien's rifle was thirty feet away from him, standing against a hemlock tree near the camp fire.

The fire itself was fully thirty feet away.

"He can see me," was the thought that flashed across Jules's mind. "The fire—he can see me! My rifle there—by the tree! He does not mean to fight fair! He will shoot me down like a dog. At this very instant he is probably aiming at my heart!"

Jules Beaubien was swift to recognize that life or death for him depended now on his cunning. If he betrayed the fact that he knew MacDonald was up there behind the trees, waiting to get a good shot at him, MacDonald would not wait but would open fire instantly. And with Beaubien unarmed there could only be one end to such an attack. Jules would die, and Hilda would wait in vain for the return of her lover.

On the other hand, Jules reasoned that if he acted quickly, and yet calmly, there was a way out of his terrible danger. It was a won-

derful test of nerve that he put upon himself. But he triumphed in the performance of it.

As if completely dismissing any alarm that the crackling of the twigs may have given him when the sounds made him halt, Jules strolled easily toward the fire. He found himself able even to make the assumption of feeling quite secure and unsuspecting of the presence of his foe by whistling a bit of song from the French voyageurs.

Jules reasoned that MacDonald would wait until the light from the camp fire shone fully on him as he approached, thus making him an easy mark for the deadly bullet that MacDonald was most eager to send into his heart.

But just as Jules came into the radius of this light, and just, indeed, as MacDonald had lifted his Winchester and was aiming as squarely and firmly as he could at the heart of Jules, the young Frenchman's strategy won

him his life, for the time at least. For Jules suddenly dashed the water from the pannikin he carried upon the fire, and in an instant, where there had been a bright flame, there was only a clogged mass of soggy embers.

The clouds still played Beaubien fair, for they absolutely obscured the moon. The blackness of the woods was absolute.

It was a terrible duel that had then to be fought—a duel in the dark. The wind had increased, and it wailed through the trees as if Nature were crying against the deadly character of the fight that was to take place.

The cry of the wolves sounded again and again. Beaubien shuddered slightly at the thought that if MacDonald killed him his body would meet the same horrible fate as had befallen his little sister, Annette.

But he shook the thought off angrily. God surely would permit the fight in the dark to

have but one result! And Jules' principal emotion was that he was happy—the hour of vengeance had come.

He was not wholly savage. His own flesh revolted at the thought of taking human life, but his absolute belief in the justice of killing MacDonald wiped away the protest of cultured instinct.

In the inky blackness of the forest there was an oppressive silence save for the winds and the wolves, and these sounds came only in intervals. For the most time MacDonald, slowly stealing down the bluff, and Beaubien, trying to locate by any sound that might be vouchsafed the presence of his enemy, could each almost imagine that he heard the heartbeats of the other.

"MacDonald," called Jules Beaubien, "you have come! It is well. You will die."

MacDonald's first answer was a shot aimed

in the direction from which Jules' voice had sounded. Jules' rifle rang in response.

"Did you think I'd wait for you, you French cur?" came the engineer's voice, tense and thrilling with hatred.

It was Jules' rifle that rang out first this time. But the bullet had not found his enemy, for MacDonald's Winchester barked back almost instantly.

In the blackness the men stole softly, hesitatingly, hoping for another sound.

Jules decided that he himself must risk speaking in order to locate, by MacDonald's reply, the direction for the shot. Dangerous as this was he took the chance.

"You have come, MacDonald, and you will die!" he whispered.

MacDonald, beside himself with rage and hatred against the man who had so far outgeneralled and defeated him—defeated him and

the evil passions that ruled his life—was moved to cry out at the risk of his own.

"Die! Damn you, it's not in you to kill me! Do you hear the wolves howling? You'll go to them."

There was another exchange of shots in the darkness, and then MacDonald's voice rose again:

"I'll hand you to the wolfpack. You will be easy picking for them. I will send you to that half-breed sister of yours. There is a heaven for mongrels. That's where you'll go!"

It was evident to Jules that MacDonald would not have risked speaking at such length if he were not behind shelter.

"Remember what I say," cried Jules, "first you go and see Annette and then you'll be sent to hell!"

A bullet sang past his ear.

For a long time then neither man spoke.

Each could now hear the stealthy footsteps of the other as they moved about. But still the thick, black clouds were over the face of the moon, and not even a gleam of light could be discerned along the rifle barrels.

Then out of the darkness came two loud cries— exclamations that involuntarily came out of the throats of Beaubien and MacDonald. In their efforts to find each other they had struck against each other.

The impact knocked their rifles from their hands. There was no time for either to stoop to regain his rifle. The hunting-knives were whipped from their sheaths.

"I've got you," said MacDonald. "I'll cut your heart out."

"Now, MacDonald, you will die. Jules Beaubien will kill you," retorted the young Canadian.

The black cloud passed off the moon. The

silver light shone on Beaubien and MacDonald in their death struggle.

They had gone to the ground, and MacDonald was on top. But quick as they had fallen Beaubien's hand had shot up and his lithe fingers closed on MacDonald's throat. The engineer was forced to give ground. Beaubien leaped to his feet.

The wind had died down. There was a single wolf's cry, and in the quiet camp by the river there could only be heard the heavy breathing of men fighting for their lives.

Time and again each sought to bring a knife thrust home, but each time a desperate hand in the darkness seized the driving hand of the foe.

For a time each clasped the wrist of his foe—the wrist of the hand that held the knife. For several seconds they stood thus, their chests heaving, the veins in their foreheads throbbing,

"DAMN YOUR KNIFE! I'LL MAKE YOU EAT IT!"

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and when the moonlight flared for an instant it looked red to them because of their bloodshot eyes.

"Damn your knife! I'll make you eat it!" panted MacDonald.

As against the other man's strength, the agility of Beaubien won the awful duel. With a sudden, swift movement he drew his hand free, and before MacDonald could recover himself the blade of Beaubien sank into his left breast—a knife fiercely driven to the very hilt.

For a second or more MacDonald merely stood with eyes bare of all light—great, stupid, staring eyes; the moon now showed Beaubien. The engineer sank at the feet of the brother of Annette, the lover of Hilda.

Jules drew back. He had put his last strength in tearing away from MacDonald and dealing him his death blow. He was staggering and found himself sobbing. Then, as men

do commonplace things subconsciously immediately after they have faced great tragedies, Beaubien leaned against a hemlock and rolled a cigarette.

As he lighted a match, he glanced at the flame. Perhaps MacDonald was not dead. Perhaps he was only slightly wounded.

He knelt and passed the match flame over the engineer's face. The glazed eyes and the dropped jaw that were revealed to him by the match's flare were all-convincing. And there, on his knees beside the dead man, he lifted his face to the sky.

"Oh, good God, forgive me that I have taken a human life. Oh, good God—Annette—Annette, who was my little, unprotected sister."

And while he knelt—knelt in a flood of moonlight streaming from a cleared sky—the long-drawn howl of a wolf struck his ear. And Jules stared back at the body.

The long howl was a call. The dreadful creatures, ever watchful in their tragically phantom-like way, seeking the scent of blood, had found it.

Jules looked at the body for several seconds, but his face grew hard. He got suddenly on his feet.

"No! No! I will do nothing. He was a wolf himself!"

CHAPTER XX

FATHER SEBASTIAN

The thing was done and done as Jules desired. He had fought MacDonald fairly. He had killed MacDonald.

He was sure that he would never feel remorse. It would be a chapter in his life that he would not like to remember, but it would be only because he would never be able to do so without thinking of Annette, the little sister whom he had never seen, and of the sorrow and shame and death that came to her the very while he was seeking her to offer her protection, comfort, even luxury.

Jules felt that his mind would be at peace. Jules felt that God was not angry with him.

Solemnly these thoughts went through his

mind, and then he thought of Hilda. It had all happened very soon after they had left. Indeed, the rifle shots must have reached their ears.

He raised his rifle and shot into the air, and then he lifted the low, carrying cry of the woodman.

"Oh, Ba'tiii——iiiste!" he called.

And in a little while the silence was broken by the dull, distant note of a rifle's report and the faint reply:

"Oh, Ju—u—u—ules!"

It was the answer of Baptiste.

With swinging steps Jules made his way along the river bank. Fatigue was no longer on him. Hilda was there—Hilda who loved him—Hilda to whom the rifle shot and his cry, coming faintly, as it were—a child's cry—had been a message of wonderful happiness.

She had clasped her hands upon her heart, and sat frightened while the faint sound of

shots was heard—the shots that MacDonald and Jules had exchanged. But then the single rifle's shot and the faint call had given her full reassurance.

"Jules, Mam'selle! Jules is safe," Baptiste had said happily to her.

"Hooray!" cried young Ferguson.

"Oh, turn back, Ba'tiste, turn back," the girl urged. "Let us go back to Jules."

The canoe was swung about, and so it came that with Jules hurrying forward and the canoe slipping silently back over the course it had taken, there was very soon a meeting.

"You have met MacDonald?" demanded Ferguson from the canoe, as Jules stood on the bank.

"MacDonald," answered Jules, quietly, "is dead."

The canoe was beached and the party gathered on the shore. Out of the woods came the

cries of wolves. Ferguson looked suddenly at Jules.

"MacDonald—of course, there has not been time—MacDonald is not buried."

"He left Annette to the wolves," said Beaubien, bitterly.

The cries of the wolves were repeated. Ferguson's face took on an expression of horror.

"Good God! I can't stand for that, Jules," he said. "MacDonald—after all—well, MacDonald was once my friend. I'll go back. There's a spade in the outfit in the canoe, isn't there? Jules, I helped you. Now you must wait for me. I'm going back. I can't leave MacDonald to the wolves."

"He leave Annette to the wolves," declared Baptiste, fiercely.

But Jules shook his head at Baptiste.

"Our friend Ferguson is right. The soul of MacDonald is before his God. It would be

savage to seek revenge on his dead body. M'sieur Ferguson, I, Jules, will go with you and help dig the grave of MacDonald, and you, Baptiste, need not help dig the grave. But you shall guard Hilda while we are away at work."

And thus the wolves were cheated of a horrible feast that night, and MacDonald's eyes were decently closed and his hands decently folded upon his breast by Ferguson before the earth was thrown upon his body.

Dawn found the little party of four before the log cabin of Father Sebastian, a Christian of the wilderness. And beside the cabin was a rude log chapel, on whose little spire gleamed a golden cross.

Father Sebastian, a little old man with a child's pure eyes, greeted them. He heard the whole story, as one would tell it man to man, and then Jules followed him within the rude

church of the woods and there, kneeling, made his spiritual confession and prayer for absolution.

And later it was agreed that Ferguson should make the trip to the nearest headquarters of the mounted police guard and tell all the facts. Baptiste would accompany him.

And if the authorities demanded the arrest of Jules Beaubien, he would surrender and stand trial.

"But if this happens, my son," advised the old priest, "you have little to fear from your fellow men—no more, I think, than you have to fear from the verdict of your God."

"And you, Ba'tiste—you will come with us to Montreal when all is settled?" asked Jules affectionately of his faithful comrade. But Baptiste shook his head.

"I go back. To the North I go, Jules Beaubien. But you will come some time to hunt

and fish, and then you will again see Ba'tiste. You, Jules Beaubien, have your love. I have only the prayer to make, that when I die, then, perhaps, I see Annette."

There was a perfunctory investigation by the mounted police, and then Father Sebastian performed a marriage ceremony.

Baptiste went back to the North woods and Ferguson went back to the civilization whence he had come.

One day a lonely, gaunt old man came out of the woods—an old man who averted his eyes insanely at the sight of yellow hair—and he laboriously went up the gang plank of a steamer bound for Scotland, his native land, for which alone his warped old heart held a tithe of affection.

The dismal old Beaubien mansion has wholly changed its character and never in all its days had it know so much happiness and content,

for Jules and Hilda with their little son, Baptiste, and their baby daughter, Annette, have taken up their abode there and the old servants and the old neighbors smile among themselves and say it is like old times again with the house of Beaubien. Sunshine flits into all its rooms; its hospitality is once more far-famed; Hilda no longer knows loneliness and sorrow or danger and the cry of the wolf sounds no longer in her ears.

THE END

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